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LETTERS TO A MISSIONARY



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# LETTERS TO A MISSIONARY

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

It seems desirable to explain the circumstances under which the following Letters came to be written.

Early in 1917 I received a circular letter from the Rev. Stanley P. Smith, a missionary stationed at Tschchowfu, in the south-east of the Chinese province of Shansi. In this letter Mr. Smith states that as long ago as 1885 he became the leader of a small party of young men (known as "the Cambridge Seven") who decided to devote their lives to missionary work in China. For seventeen years Mr. Smith worked in connexion with the well-known society known as the China Inland Mission, and then (about the year 1902) was asked to retire from the Mission owing to his "views on eschatology"—in other words, his refusal to believe in an everlasting hell. According to Mr. Smith's own belief, "eternal punishment" is an undoubted truth, because clearly taught in the Bible; he denies, however, that the term translated by the word "eternal" necessarily means "everlasting." While continuing, therefore, to have absolute faith in the Scriptural doctrine of hell, he maintained that it had been misunderstood, that the torments of hell would not, in the strict sense, last *for ever*, and that "the revealed consummation of things was universal reconciliation, when the great God and Father would become 'all' in all his intelligent

*creatures."* From the point of view of the China Inland Mission, which officially held and taught the doctrine to which Mr. Smith objected, his milder interpretation of the Scriptural texts was heretical; it was necessary, therefore, that he should cease to co-operate with that Mission in bringing the "glad tidings" of Christianity to the people of China.

Though dismissed from the Mission, Mr. Smith explains that his relations with it continued to be friendly. He carried on his own missionary work independently, but a vague understanding existed between them that if the Mission ever saw fit to moderate the rigour of its official views on the subject of hell, or even to allow its individual members to hold and express views of a milder type, Mr. Smith's independent mission would then be re-united to the parent body.

During the twelve ensuing years Mr. Smith saw reason for hoping that the milder views advocated by himself were beginning to prevail, and he confidently looked forward to a reconciliation. In 1914, however, his hopes were rudely extinguished by the action taken by the Rev. Henry W. Frost, Director for North America of the China Inland Mission. In that year this high authority published in the official organ of the Mission a statement of doctrine which made it quite clear that the China Inland Mission (commonly called the C.I.M.) still adhered to the theory of hell-torments in its most savage form. The damned were to include not only "unsaved" Christians, but also all the untold millions of "heathen" who "had never heard of Christ"; the sufferings of the damned, moreover, were to be *conscious* sufferings and were to last literally *for ever*. It was further declared that these



views were “fundamental,” “necessary” and “essential” to the Christian faith, and that “to have fellowship with Christians in corporate service” who held a milder creed was “unwarrantable from the standpoint of the individual, and dangerous from the standpoint of the truth.”

Mr. Smith vigorously protested against this horrible doctrine, and felt that unless it were retracted or modified he could never consent to allow the work of his independent mission to pass into the hands of the C.I.M., because in his opinion “nothing less than the character of God and the honour of Christianity were at stake.” The object of his circular letter was to enlist the support of people who sympathized with the attitude he had taken up. “There are two possible courses,” he says, “now open to me. One is, to extend the work of the mission, if God will touch the hearts of some of His children to support it. The other is, we might possibly rejoin the C.I.M. *if toleration is granted*. The founder, Mr. Hudson Taylor, believed the time would come to pass when it would be possible to admit it.”

It is clear from various passages in Mr. Smith’s letter that, apart from his sturdy disbelief in the literal endlessness of hell, his religious views are substantially those of old-fashioned Protestant orthodoxy. By describing his views as “old-fashioned” I mean that they appear to have been wholly uninfluenced by modern Biblical criticism, whether “higher” or textual, and that his general doctrinal position seems to be practically identical with that of Protestant England before the days of Colenso and the publication of *Essays and Reviews*. With Mr. Smith’s general position, however, the letters

that follow are only indirectly concerned; they deal primarily with certain moral and other problems arising out of his controversy with the C.I.M. on the subject of the Christian doctrine of future punishment.

Of the eight letters which this book contains, the first three were written in answer to the circular letter already referred to. Later on, Mr. Smith was kind enough to send me a number of pamphlets which had been printed for him by a well-known publishing firm—the Commercial Press of Shanghai. He also sent me a short letter, from which the following passages are extracted.

*“Tsehchowfu,  
“June 17, 1917.*

“DEAR SIR,

“ . . . Under another cover I am sending you four booklets and a copy of ‘Final Correspondence with the C.I.M.’ Perhaps at your leisure you might have time to look through them, though that is asking a great deal! . . .

“At present, with what evidence I have before me, I cannot look upon you as a Christian, or as a friend of Christianity; but here I may be mistaken, for I mostly know your destructive sentiments and not your constructive ones. For my part, I am a convinced believer in Christ, and a believer in the Bible as containing a Divine revelation of True Religion. . . . I hate the doctrine of an endless hell just as much as you do, but the grounds of our hatred differ. I would be thankful if the C.I.M. could be compelled to reconsider its position as to this question, but I don’t want with the overthrowing of a miserable unscriptural dogma to couple with that the subversion of Christianity; but, on the contrary, to help to remove a great

stumbling-block from the reception of Christianity and establish it more firmly than ever upon a true Scriptural basis.

“You are quite free to quote from my letters to you, and from my booklets.

“I would add that I seek the good of the C.I.M. and not its harm, though my conscience compels me to take the action I am taking. I do not despise the Mission as a Mission, nor the missionaries who compose it, nor, generally speaking, the doctrines for which the Mission stands. I believe the C.I.M. is doing great good in China. Its missionaries *as a rule* are (so far as I know) men and women who exhibit a Christian character and unselfishly seek the spiritual welfare of the Chinese.

“Yours very sincerely,

(Signed) “STANLEY P. SMITH.”

Mr. Smith's pamphlets were of great interest, but it is unnecessary to deal with them in detail in this introductory chapter, as they are discussed in my letters. They throw a vivid light on the teachings of the C.I.M., and a perusal of them would perhaps startle a good many of those well-meaning Christians in the British Empire and in the United States who contribute lavishly to the support of foreign missions without taking pains to investigate the nature of the religion which they are helping to propagate among the civilized peoples of Asia. It is clear that, in putting forth the views mentioned above, the Rev. Mr. Frost did not intend to speak for himself alone, but for the Mission as a whole, or at least for that very large section of the Mission—the North American—of which he was and still is Director. After stating that all who “die out of Christ,” whether they have “heard the Gospel” or

not, will be condemned to conscious torments which will last for ever—a doctrine which he held to be “essential to the Gospel of Christ”—he added that this doctrine “expresses what *true Christians* may well make their basis of fellowship in interdenominational service”; and he exhorted all friends of the Mission earnestly to pray that it would be “wholly and ever true to the doctrines upon which it was founded.”

In answer to Mr. Smith’s direct enquiries, Mr. Frost replied that the views published by him in the official organ of the Mission “were those of the American branch of the C.I.M.”; he did not venture to say definitely that the other branches would assent to his statement of the Mission’s fundamental creed, but he was evidently confident that such was the case; were it otherwise, the Mission would necessarily undergo disintegration, as the American members, siding with Mr. Frost, would no longer be able to “have fellowship with Christians in corporate service” who declined to share their views as to what constituted essential Christian teaching. Mr. Smith, however, wisely decided to test the matter by writing to the *General Director* of the C.I.M., Mr. D. E. Hoste, drawing his attention to the doctrinal statement published by Mr. Frost in the American edition of *China’s Millions* (the Mission’s official organ) and asking him to insert in the *English* edition of that organ a public notification to the effect that the statement in question, though made in good faith, was misleading, that Mr. Frost’s action in publicly and definitely associating the Mission with his own views was unauthorized, and that the Mission as a whole did not endorse what he had written. Mr. Hoste firmly refused to publish any such notification, and thereby

gave tacit approval to the action taken by Mr. Frost. A final appeal to Mr. Frost merely elicited the laconic remark, "I cannot conscientiously alter the position which I have taken."

It was in the pages of an American theological journal, nearly as well known in England as in the United States, that Dr. Hastings Rashdall, now Dean of Carlisle, wrote the following words a few years ago. "How far orthodox people of the last generation really did believe that the whole heathen world was doomed to everlasting torments unless they heard and accepted what is technically called the gospel, I will not attempt to inquire. If we go far enough back, there certainly was a time when such a creed was held. . . . Modern orthodox theology has given a more uncertain sound upon this matter; but it cannot be denied that missionary appeals have frequently assumed that some awful fate was in store for the heathen, no matter how fully they acted up to their light and no matter how great the measure of that light, if they died without having accepted the gospel message. . . . It would be a waste of time to argue against such a view at the present day."

If these pages achieve the distinction of coming under Dean Rashdall's notice, I trust he will realize that the doctrine which he believed to be extinct is still very much alive.

Writing in 1907, he declared that *if we went far enough back* we should find that it was an actually existing belief—implying thereby that we should have to go a long way back to find it so. If he could have looked forward instead of backward he

would have found it still flourishing among a large and influential section of missionaries in China (not to mention their supporters at home) ten years after he announced that it had long ceased to exist !

If it is surprising to find Dean Rashdall imperfectly informed on this subject, stranger still is it to meet with one who is himself a missionary similarly assuming that this ghastly doctrine of the damnation of all non-Christian peoples is a thing of the past. In his valuable book *Our Task in India*, Mr. Bernard Lucas, writing of the missionaries of an earlier day, says they regarded all non-Christians "as passing in a terrible procession, minute by minute, to an eternal woe." In illustration of this, he might have quoted the edifying hymn—once popular in missionary circles—of which a stanza runs as follows :—

"The heathen perish day by day,  
Thousands on thousands pass away ;  
O Christians, to their rescue fly !  
Preach Jesus to them ere they die."

It may be that in India (the only mission-field, apparently, with which this writer is personally acquainted) the doctrine is no longer believed or taught—though, as will be seen presently, there is reason to doubt this ; but granting that it is so, why should poor China alone be compelled to support it in its unhallowed decrepitude ?

To drive this monstrous superstition out of its last refuge may be a difficult task ; in view, however, of its love for dark corners and underground passages (otherwise how could it have escaped the keen eyes of Dean Rashdall and Mr. Lucas ?) perhaps the most effectual method of shortening its life is to drag it

out into the full blaze of publicity and expose its wizened and writhing carcase (as the Chinese in pre-historic days used to expose their witches) to the pitiless rays of the sun. In this laudable enterprise it is hoped that the publication of this little book will be of some small service; but the success of the operation must depend on the public itself, or on those members of the public who provide the funds without which foreign missions would gradually wither away.

It is only fair to emphasize the fact that the infamous doctrine of the eternal damnation of sinners and of all the "heathen" is not taught, even in China, by the entire missionary body. Outside the C.I.M. and the smaller missions which are in friendly alliance with it, the doctrine would probably be repudiated more or less energetically by the great majority of missionaries now working in China. That it is not absolutely confined to the C.I.M. is undoubtedly true; and probably it is privately entertained by a good many missionaries who, knowing that it is now a discredited dogma among educated Christians in the West, would be shy of maintaining it in public. That the theology of the mission-field is often of an antiquated type is a fact which should be too well known to need emphasis. "Serious enthusiasm for missions," as Dr. Rashdall remarks in the essay from which I have already quoted, "tends to be associated with a rather narrow theology. The greatest of the missionary societies of the English Church is largely in the hands of the narrowest section of the narrowest party in that Church. The authorities of the Church



Missionary Society have been known to refuse an admirably qualified candidate of otherwise evangelical opinions on account of a measure of sympathy with critical theology which few of our present bishops would disclaim." Missionaries, however, can be narrow in their theology without holding that all who fail to undergo the process of "conversion," and all who have never heard "the gospel," will assuredly be damned. That this doctrine is no longer insisted upon as the most urgent of all reasons for sending missions to the millions who would otherwise be "lost," is proved by the fact that it seems to have been almost totally ignored by the various writers and speakers who took part in the great Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910. Indeed, the few references to it that I have come across in the voluminous reports of that Conference clearly indicate that it had already ceased to form part of the creed of enlightened missionaries. It is true that the following extracts are from reports sent in not from China but from India; nevertheless the sentiments expressed appear to have been received with equanimity by the Conference as a whole, which included many representatives from China. "More than one writer," we are told in the course of some editorial observations, "refer to the opposition to the Christian faith which is aroused by the insistence on the doctrine of eternal punishment, *which was a prominent characteristic of the preaching of missionaries a generation ago and still characterizes the teaching of a certain number.*" A missionary is quoted as follows: "Few causes have prejudiced the Hindu mind more, and aroused fiercer opposition,



than the traditional view of the final destiny of the wicked. . . . *The traditional view, however honestly held, should never be placed in the forefront of missionary teaching.*" (See *Edinburgh Conference Reports*, vol. iv. pp. 193-4. These extracts alone seem to show that even in India the hell-doctrine is not, as Mr. Bernard Lucas thinks, entirely obsolete.)

I am only too glad to assume, however, that this ugly superstition has been condemned or set aside by the majority of the missionary societies now working among the numerous peoples called "heathen," and that even in China its propagation is mainly confined to the C.I.M. As there are a great many societies at work in China, representing a large proportion of the sects into which Christendom is divided, it may seem hardly worth while to emphasize the eccentricities of a single Mission—a Mission which, moreover, is looked at askance by most of its rivals. But no one who has travelled in the interior of China, and is sufficiently interested in missionaries and their activities to be able to differentiate one missionary body from another, will dispute the fact that throughout many of China's inland provinces the influence of the C.I.M. is greater than that of all other Protestant Missions put together. Very many thousands, if not millions, of Chinese have derived all their knowledge of Christianity from the itinerating members of this zealous and ubiquitous society, which draws its large army of evangelists from several European and American nationalities and from a great variety of Protestant sects. The C.I.M., moreover, is "associated" in a very friendly way with a group of other societies, which look up to it as their

“predominant partner,” and appear to be in entire sympathy with it in matters doctrinal.<sup>1</sup>

I have just remarked that by most of the other more important missions the C.I.M. is looked at askance. This is but a mild way of stating the attitude towards the C.I.M. which in *private conversation* is often assumed by individual missionaries belonging to other societies. The “revivalism,” for example, which is one of the most distressing features of C.I.M. methods, has been described to me by the shocked members of other missions as “nauseating,” and some of the C.I.M. doctrines—including that which forms our main topic—are denounced in terms of ridicule or disgust. Now the question arises, If the more enlightened members of the missionary body disapprove of C.I.M. teachings and methods as whole-heartedly as in private they often say they do, how is it that they do not state their views publicly in such a way as to compel the C.I.M. to justify itself (if that be possible) before the bar of public opinion or before some authoritative ecclesiastical tribunal—if, in Protestantism, such can be found? Perhaps it is merely professional etiquette that restrains them—the kind of etiquette that prevents one doctor from

<sup>1</sup> The C.I.M. works in every province of China except three. In its Jubilee year (1915) it possessed 225 mission stations, over 1000 foreign missionaries, nearly 3000 paid or unpaid native assistants and workers, and 754 organized churches. Eleven other missionary societies are associated with the C.I.M. They co-operate with it in evangelistic work and agree with it in aim and principles. “The complete subordination of all other forms of work to the direct preaching of the Gospel” is part of the C.I.M.’s fixed policy. For these and other facts see the Rev. S. Couling’s *Encyclopædia Sinica*, 1917. The C.I.M. is there described as “by far the largest Missionary Society operating in China.”

accusing another of incompetence or negligence. But although among missionaries *esprit de corps* is very strong, there are certain limits beyond which it ceases to be effective. For example, missionaries of an extreme Protestant type are frequently most bitter in their criticisms of the Roman Catholics; indeed, they do not shrink from suggesting that the Romanists are inspired by the Devil, and in many of their publications the "hosts of Rome" are spoken of as the allies of the "hosts of Darkness." Heretical bodies such as the Seventh Day Adventists and Unitarians are sometimes referred to in terms of sharp disapproval; Anglicans come in for a good deal of censure on account of their real or supposed anxiety to cultivate intimate relations with Rome; and missionaries who are suspected of being tainted with Modernism or "Liberal" theology are often referred to by the orthodox majority in all missions in terms of undisguised distrust, indignation, or contempt. As for the Romanist opinions of all Protestant missionaries, I need only refer my readers to Father Bertram Wolferstan's illuminating book on *The Catholic Church in China*. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that nearly all the sectarian jealousies and animosities of the Christian West are reproduced on a smaller scale in the mission-field, it is undoubtedly true that the most earnest and intelligent members of the missionary body do try hard to cultivate mutual goodwill, to avoid unnecessary friction, to act on the principle of "live and let live," and to present a united and harmonious front (in appearance if not in reality) to the forces of "heathenism." "The amount of harmony and concord," says Canon C. H. Robinson, "which is to be found to-day in the Mission Field is,

happily, greater than many are apt to imagine. It exists to a far larger extent amongst the representatives of missionaries abroad than amongst the representatives of missionary societies at home." (*The Missionary Prospect*, pp. 234-5.)

Professional etiquette, then, and a general desire for concord, are partly responsible for the extraordinary spectacle of the largest and most active of Christian proselytizing agencies propagating through the length and breadth of China certain doctrines which (to quote the Rev. Mr. Stanley Smith's vivid phrase) "brand the character of God with infinite disgrace," while its sister-missions maintain towards this potent and aggressive society of God-calumniators a public attitude of good-humoured *laisser-faire* and cheerful unconcern. It would almost appear that the maintenance of a more or less fictitious appearance of harmony in face of the "heathen" and "infidel" enemy is to them of more pressing importance than the defence of the honour of their God. It is not that Christian meekness forbids their engaging in public controversy. If some isolated agnostic, or a professor of the Hongkong University, makes a casual remark, in the course of a newspaper article, to the effect that intelligent men no longer regard the Bible as a wholly accurate record of historic or scientific fact, these genial *laisser-faire* missionaries and their lay allies will promptly pour forth the vials of holy wrath on the head of the sacrilegious sceptic who has dared to question the authority of their infallible and divinely-inspired Scriptures. (This has actually happened within the last eighteen months, as can be seen by a reference to the correspondence columns of *The North China Daily News* in the early summer of 1917.) Yet if numbers

of their own missionary colleagues publicly and persistently advocate an eschatological theory which, if true, proves the Christian God to be guilty of atrocities that make Satan or the Germans look like bungling amateurs in devilry, they maintain a discreet and courteous silence.

But mere *esprit de corps* and a desire to avoid friction are inadequate to account for this curious phenomenon. The real reason will be found, I think, to lie deeper. It seems to be based on a more or less subconscious knowledge that eternal damnation is only one of a large number of traditional Christian doctrines which the moral perception of mankind is showing a rapidly increasing tendency to discard, and that to reproach the C.I.M. for continuing to hold doctrines of this kind might provoke a highly embarrassing retort and possibly give rise to questions which, if thoroughly sifted, might shake the whole structure of orthodox Christianity. It would be quite legitimate for the C.I.M. to reply to these reproaches in terms such as the following :—

We entirely agree with you that the doctrine of everlasting damnation involves grave moral difficulties, and that it is difficult for the human mind to reconcile it with the existence of the all-loving, merciful, and omnipotent Deity postulated by Christianity. But the doctrine was not invented by us ; it has been revealed to mankind by God Himself through the medium of authoritative Scriptures which all Christians believe to be divinely inspired. You may say it is horrible, but we have nothing to do with that—it is not for us to dictate to God what laws He should make for our

government or to criticize the arrangements wisely and lovingly made by Him for the disposal of our souls. If you deny this particular doctrine simply because you do not like it, you are assuming the totally unwarrantable liberty to pick and choose between God's revealed truths. Instead of going to the Bible in a spirit of trustful humility to learn from it what righteousness and truth consist in, you are presuming to accept those of its teachings that suit your taste, while you impiously reject the rest. This being so, you cannot pretend that you recognize the Bible as your ultimate and infallible authority; you make what you are pleased to term your own moral consciousness your authority, and if you turn to the Bible at all it is only to obtain confirmation of your private opinions. If the Bible fails to give you the desired confirmation, or contradicts you, its testimony is rejected. In other words, you treat the Bible just as you would treat any other book, which is precisely what the infidels and agnostics presumptuously urge us to do. Perhaps if you are sincerely anxious to have the right to call yourself a Christian, you will attempt to show that the doctrines which you dislike are not really in the Bible, or that the Biblical passages on which doctrines were founded have been incorrectly interpreted. It is of course theoretically conceivable that you are right—we are bound to admit as much, because as faithful Protestants we ourselves reject the interpretations put by the Church of Rome on the *tu es Petrus* and many other important Biblical texts. We would have you remember, however, that the doctrine of eternal punishment has not only been taught *de fide* by the undivided Church, but has also been accepted as true by the Churches of the Reformation, and that, though many individuals have called it in question, the vast majority of



theologians in both the Catholic and the Protestant divisions of Christendom have held it to be clearly proved by the infallible and unmistakable words of Scripture. We cannot but feel, therefore, that your real reason for rejecting it is not that you honestly believe it to be unscriptural, but simply that you have arraigned it before the tribunal of your own fallible intellect or conscience, and have rashly presumed to condemn it as morally objectionable. We take the liberty of warning you that even in Protestantism the exercise of the right of "private judgment" may carry you a great deal further than you may care to go; at any rate there are others who will readily follow where you have led, but will see no reason for stopping where you stop. In reproaching us for our fidelity to traditional Christian orthodoxy, how can you be sure that others, more logical or more daring than you, will not finally join the ever-growing throng of people who make no secret of the fact that they have definitely broken with Christianity?

I think most of my thoughtful readers will admit that if the Directors of the C.I.M. chose to state their case in some such words as these, it would be difficult for their missionary critics to confute them; and this is perhaps the best explanation of the curious fact to which I have drawn attention, that the C.I.M. has not hitherto met with any public opposition from other Christian bodies when it enunciates doctrines which represent the Christian deity as a monster of cruelty and injustice.

I need hardly say that my object in publishing this book is not merely to draw public attention to the survival among missionaries in China of a preposterous

doctrine which enlightened Christendom has emphatically repudiated and the mention of which in these days of little faith is apt to produce more smiles than groans. My aim will be unfulfilled unless I can persuade some, at least, of the supporters of foreign missions not only to undertake a critical examination of the teachings and methods of the missionaries whom they employ to carry Western religion to Asia, but also to scrutinize with equal care the foundations of their own conceptions of religious truth. It was not an agnostic, not a would-be destroyer of religion, but a devout Christian and a high official of the Methodist Episcopal Church (George Preston Mains), who lately drew attention to "the persistent attempt to bind the Church to views which the educated mind of the age has not only out-grown, but which it utterly rejects." Nowhere is this attempt made more persistently than in certain areas of the mission-field. I referred above to a discussion which recently took place in the columns of a Shanghai newspaper. It would doubtless have horrified the orthodox contributors to that discussion had their attention been drawn to the following words by a historian of science, quoted with hearty approval by the venerable occupant of a Scottish pulpit. "There is not an intelligent man in the whole wide earth who longer believes that the Mosaic account of Creation is true . . . or that the sun stood still in Gibeon. We are past all that. This is something." Alas! these beliefs are still stoutly maintained in China by English and American missionaries who would be deeply mortified if they were to hear themselves described as unintelligent. The same preacher adds that even Orthodoxy "is obliged to admit that its con-



ception of the Bible has changed. It can no longer regard the Old and New Testaments as the infallible Word of God. . . . The priestly representation of a bloodthirsty Deity has become morally abhorrent, and the sacrificial system as transferred to Christianity is no longer endurable." (Webster's *Theology in Scotland*, 1915.) Mr. Webster's words may be applicable to the case of his own countrymen, who in recent years have shown an increasing desire to throw off the shackles of the horrible creed inherited by them from their fathers, but he would have been less optimistic in his language if the Chinese mission-field had come within his range of vision. A distinguished American divine writes in a theological journal of the "forever outgrown notion of vicarious punishment." I can assure him that the notion still flourishes like a rank weed in China. Canon Storr is one of the many able theologians of our time who have warned his fellow-Christians that "reconstruction and reformulation of dogma are imperative." He adds that "an immense intellectual revolution has been accomplished, and theology must boldly face the situation." There is very little indication as yet of any intention to face it boldly on the mission-field.

Whether "reconstruction and reformulation" will really meet the spiritual requirements of the modern mind either at home or abroad, or whether the religion that emerges from the hands of the rebuilders will be entitled to bear the name of Christianity, are questions on which an opinion has been hazarded in the course of the following letters, though perhaps they hardly come within the scope of one who stands outside all the Christian organizations. However that may be, there are signs on all hands that changes of vital importance

are taking place in the attitude of thoughtful men—both lay and clerical—towards the Christianity of the creeds and churches, and that the process of change will be hastened and intensified by the great war. There is little likelihood that Christianity will maintain even her present slight hold on men's hearts and minds unless she consents to pour out the dregs that remain in her old bottles and shows a readiness to fill them up with the new wine for which the souls of men are spiritually athirst. Be it admitted that the process will be a dangerous one, for the old bottles may burst—indeed, many believe they must necessarily do so. Nevertheless, Christianity must take the risk, great as it is; for if she refuses to supply the new wine to those who ask, they will assuredly go and seek it elsewhere, perhaps in bottles with a different label and bearing the name of a different vintage. In the meantime it is earnestly to be hoped that Christendom will not continue to allow the old bottles with their nauseating dregs to be exported to China and other "heathen" lands under the deceptive label of "true religion." If the peoples of the West value the souls of the "heathen" as highly as they profess to do, they will surely prohibit a traffic which is just as morally indefensible as the trade in opium or cocaine.

# LETTERS TO A MISSIONARY

## LETTER I

A SHORT time ago you were kind enough to send me a copy of your circular letter dealing with the circumstances which led to your enforced retirement from the China Inland Mission and to the establishment of your independent mission at 'Tschchowfu. Your letter is addressed to the *Christian public*, to which, doubtless, you assumed that I belonged. In these days of "re-statement" and "reinterpretation" and incessant shifting of old religious landmarks, it seems to be impossible to obtain an authoritative or intelligible definition of what Christianity really is—except, of course, from the Church of Rome, which, whatever its demerits may be, does at least possess the great merit of knowing its own mind. Men whose views would have brought them to the stake a few generations ago, and would have been condemned as outrageously heretical and even blasphemous in our grandfathers' time, are to-day occupying posts of influence and dignity in the Christian priesthoods and ministries, and are in many cases looked up to as pillars of highly respectable orthodoxy. In spite, however, of the nebulous character of present-day Christianity, I may as well confess at the outset that so

far as I am aware there is no Christian Mission in China which would regard me as entitled to Christian membership. Indeed, if any Mission were so latitudinarian in its views as to regard me as a spiritual brother, I fear I should be ungrateful enough to question the validity of its own claims to be regarded as a Christian body.

Nevertheless, as you have taken the initiative in including me among your correspondents, you will allow me, I hope, to write to you in return, and to tell you very frankly some of the thoughts that your letter has suggested to me. In the first place, it seems to me that you deserve high respect for the courage and honesty shown by you in your dealings with the C.I.M. and in your efforts to establish a new Mission on a broader doctrinal basis; and that you are to be warmly congratulated on your repudiation of the infamous doctrine of an everlasting hell.

During almost twenty years' residence in China I have travelled a great deal in the inland provinces, and have seen and heard something of the work and teachings of the C.I.M. and many other Missions. I have also been a student of missionary literature. I was well aware, therefore, of the main characteristics of the theology (and demonology) taught by the C.I.M. I knew that its Christianity was in many respects narrow and even repulsive, and of a kind that would excite little but contempt and disgust if it were preached to educated congregations in twentieth-century America or England. The vast majority of Western residents in China rarely go beyond the treaty-ports, where the C.I.M. is not much in evidence; thus it is not surprising that they often express incredulity when they are told of some of the more glaring peculiarities of that

special type of Christianity which is propagated in China by the C.I.M. and which the "heathen" Chinese are expected to welcome as "tidings of great joy." In this letter I wish to devote my attention to your own main subject; I will therefore omit all reference to other features of C.I.M. teaching and confine myself to that particular piece of "good news" which, as you point out, has lately been emphatically re-affirmed by those entitled to speak on its behalf. This good news is to the effect that not only all who have heard the gospel and are not "saved" in this life, but also all "heathen" who have never heard of Christ, will go to "absolutely unending, conscious suffering." This, we are informed, is a "fundamental, necessary, and essential" part of Christian teaching; whence it follows that "to have fellowship with Christians in corporate service" who do not assent to these views is "unwarrantable from the standpoint of the individual, and dangerous from the standpoint of the truth."

You say in your letter that it was on account of your disagreement with views of this kind that you were obliged, fifteen years ago, to retire from the C.I.M. Since your dismissal, the tendency in the Mission "had been towards toleration in eschatology," and you hoped that the doctrinal differences between yourself and the Mission might be gradually effaced; but the recent pronouncement above quoted has compelled you to perceive that the estrangement must continue. I sincerely trust that very wide publicity will be given to your letter, and that the British and American public will realize, perhaps for the first time, the hideous nature of some of the religious teachings which they themselves, through the moral and material support so generously

given by them to the C.I.M., are helping to propagate among the people of China.

And yet, after all, is it not true that the C.I.M., in preaching the doctrine of everlasting damnation, is acting in strict fidelity to the very principle by which you yourself are guided—namely, “the divine inspiration, authority, and sufficiency” of the Bible? The difference between you is one of interpretation. The C.I.M. finds, on consulting its infallible authority, that everlasting damnation is taught there; you, consulting the same infallible authority, find that everlasting damnation is *not* taught there. Who is to judge between your divergent interpretations? It is doubtless true that the educated non-Roman Christendom of to-day is at one with you in rejecting the tenet you very justifiably complain of; but it is no less certain that the view taken by the C.I.M. is the traditional Christian view, and has been supported by the opinion of the vast majority of Church Fathers and theologians. It is a significant fact, moreover—though probably neither you nor the C.I.M. would ascribe great importance to it—that the doctrine is held to be *de fide* by the only Christian Church which (if its own statement is accurate) can show unbroken continuity from apostolic times, and which claims perpetual divine guidance and infallibility. In one rather cryptic sentence you imply that you might possibly rejoin the C.I.M. if “toleration” were granted. By “toleration” is apparently meant liberty to members of the C.I.M. to believe or disbelieve, as they choose, in the doctrine of everlasting damnation. You add that the founder of the Mission, Mr. Hudson Taylor, “believed the time would come to pass when it would be possible to admit” such tolera-

tion. This seems to require explanation. Did Mr. Taylor mean that members of the C.I.M. might be allowed later on (but not now) to preach a doctrine (universal salvation) which is flatly contradicted by the Bible? Or did he mean that everlasting punishment was *not* part of the Bible teaching, and that the C.I.M. had hitherto erred in supposing that it was? Or can he have meant that the Almighty might be expected, at some indeterminate date in the future, to change his mind about everlasting punishment and to annihilate the hell which, in a cruder state of his moral development, he had prepared for the Devil and his angels? If the C.I.M. remains as true to its own principles as you are to yours, and also adheres to its own interpretation of the book which you both accept as your ultimate authority, how is it possible that any reconciliation between you can take place? Even if the Mission, while officially adhering to its own interpretation of the Scriptures, consented to allow its individual members to hold and teach views which were inconsistent with that interpretation, it is difficult to see how you could conscientiously consent to avail yourself of such toleration; for by so doing you would be allying yourself with a Mission which in its official teaching was engaged in what you believed to be the nefarious work of impugning the "character of God" and the "honour of Christianity."

This brings me to a matter of great importance. You say that before your retirement from the C.I.M. you "had come to see from Scripture" that there could be no such thing as "strictly *endless* wrath and punishment," and that "the revealed consummation of all things was universal reconciliation." I gather that



you were led to investigate the Biblical texts bearing on the subject because the doctrine gave you discomfort and seemed to have an "important bearing on the most grave subject of *the character of God*." In other words, you had an uneasy feeling that *if* God is indeed omnipotent and *if* he consigns any of his creatures to everlasting torment, it would be difficult if not impossible for you to regard him at the same time as a God of limitless compassion and love. To escape from this dilemma you studied the eschatological passages in the Bible for yourself, and I can well imagine your satisfaction when you arrived at the wished-for conclusion that endless punishment is not taught there. You then made your views and conclusions known, and, as a result, you were obliged to sever your connexion with the C.I.M. Now I hope it is not impertinent to ask what action you would have taken if your Scriptural studies had led you to a different conclusion—to the conclusion which has been arrived at by innumerable Christian saints, popes, theologians, and simple Bible-students like yourself, and which the historic Churches have officially endorsed as correct or at least have refrained from repudiating? Would you have bravely refused to pretend that you saw good where you saw evil? Then it would have been necessary for you to surrender the Bible as an infallible doctrinal or moral guide. Or would you have insisted that at all costs the testimony of the Bible must be preferred to the testimony of your own moral consciousness? I gladly welcome your recognition of what you term "an insuperable moral difficulty" in the view that an all-good and omnipotent Deity condemns men to endless suffering, and yet I must candidly tell you that the general



tenor of your letter leaves me with the painful impression that *had you been compelled to recognize the doctrine as Biblical* you would have accepted it with dutiful obedience and allowed the "insuperable moral difficulty" to float quietly away into some stagnant backwater of the river of your mind. You might, indeed, have succeeded, perhaps at a ruinous moral cost, in adapting yourself to a point of view similar to that of Pascal, who held that man's "wretched rules of justice" have no application to the Deity, who must not be called unjust even if he chooses to sentence the entire human race to eternal damnation; or possibly you might have forced yourself to see eye to eye with Jonathan Edwards, who, you may remember, thought at one time that eternal damnation was "a horrible doctrine," but afterwards contrived to persuade himself that it was "exceedingly pleasant, bright, and sweet."

To me it seems a pitiful thing that men should force themselves, against their better feelings, to accept a disgusting doctrine as true simply out of loyalty to a book that they believe infallible. In an old number of *The Chinese Recorder* (vol. ix. 1878) I find a missionary in China writing thus: "I freely grant that my *feelings* are as much opposed to this awful doctrine of eternal punishment as any man's. But I *dare not* trust my feelings to arbitrate either this or other things hard to be understood. It is madness to allow our *rebellious feelings* to eliminate from our creed what God's words plainly teach." (The italics are in the original.) It must have been unhappy Christians of this type that Lecky had in mind when he wrote thus: "They accordingly esteem it a matter of duty, and a commendable exercise of humility, to stifle the moral feelings of their

nature, and they at last succeed in persuading themselves that their Divinity would be extremely offended if they hesitated to ascribe to Him the attributes of a fiend."

The question I have put to you in the last paragraph but one will not, I trust, be set aside as irrelevant; for although you yourself are not, as it fortunately happens, in the embarrassing position of having to choose between the Bible and your own moral consciousness, there are multitudes of other Christians who may at any time find themselves in this awkward predicament; and it is from men like yourself that they may reasonably expect counsel and help. I would remind you, while on this topic, that the following words were written in the middle of the last century by one of the contributors to *Essays and Reviews*: "With respect to the moral treatment of His creatures by Almighty God, all men, in different degrees, are able to be judges of the representations made of it *by reason of the moral sense* which He has given them." This is reasonable and satisfactory; but what is to be done if the judgments arrived at by the moral sense conflict with the statements of a book which the possessor of that moral sense regards as infallible?

I do not presume to give a personal opinion as to whether you are right or wrong in your interpretation of the Biblical texts on which the hell-doctrine is based. If the matter could be settled by a majority vote there is no doubt whatever that you would be defeated. I am inclined to think that Justin Martyr, Minucius Felix, Cyprian, Lactantius, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Anselm (whose *Cur Deus Homo* tells us how the punishment of sinners "gives honour to God"),

Thomas Aquinas, Luther and Calvin and their successors, are all against you. You are at liberty to claim Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa as your allies; and Origen, as you know, believed that even the Devil himself would finally be saved. Origen's opinion is often triumphantly quoted by those who hold views like yours, but his lapses from orthodoxy in this and other respects have long ago been condemned by the Church. Monsignor Louis Duchesne, in his *Early History of the Christian Church*, remarks that Origen's system "is scarcely recognizable as Christianity," but is "a sort of compromise between the Gospel and Gnosticism"; it is a system "in which the traditional teaching is rather evaded than incorporated." You could summon Cœlestius and Pelagius as witnesses on your side. They, indeed, were heretics; but as you yourself and all the members of the C.I.M. are also heretics in the sight of the Church which rejected Pelagianism, there seems to be no grave reason why you should not regard their testimony as valid if you choose to do so—and Origen's too, if it comes to that. Among medieval authorities you could cite Joannes Scotus Erigena, for did he not declare that evil had no substance and that all would ultimately be God? The heretical Catharists also believed in universal salvation, and at a later period the same belief distinguished the followers of John Cameron. In 1658, again, there was a book published in England called *Of the torments of Hell: the foundations and pillars thereof discover'd, search'd, shaken, and removed*, which denied that the conception of a place of eternal torment was "either scriptural or credible"; and a clergyman named Evanson, in the last quarter of the

eighteenth century, gave up his belief in eternal punishment "though continuing to believe in 'long protracted' misery for sinners." (See Robertson's *Short History of Freethought*, 3rd ed. vol. ii. pp. 77, 203.) By the middle of the seventeenth century it would appear that Universalism had become a rather prevalent heresy in England, for in 1648 the Puritans secured the passing of an Act against "blasphemies and heresies," whereby it was made a punishable offence to declare that "all men shall be saved." In spite of this Act, which I presume soon became obsolete, the Universalist heresy maintained its ground, as is proved by the publication of the books last mentioned. In the eighteenth century John Wesley, in his *Journal*, refers with disdain to two writers whose views seem to have been not unlike yours. One apparently believed that hell would last five million years and would then be annihilated, while the other advocated the still more cheerful theory that it would last no more than a paltry 30,000 years. Wesley complains that "these menders of the Bible" "not only obtrude their novel scheme with the utmost confidence, but even ridicule that Scriptural one, which always was, and is now held by men of the greatest learning and piety in the world." He concludes that writers who venture to question the truth of the Scriptural teaching "promote the cause of infidelity more effectually than either Hume or Voltaire." It is evident that Wesley would have disapproved most strongly of the views put forward by yourself!

Nearer our own time, however, your heresy has been shared by numerous theological writers of eminence; indeed, there is reason to expect that before long the

traditional view will be as rarely maintained as yours was in Wesley's time. Perhaps we should not be surprised to find that the C.I.M. is conservative in this respect, when we remember how recently it was that so spiritually-minded a man as F. D. Maurice was deprived of his professorial chair at King's College, London, because he dared to call in question the endlessness of hell-torments. His opinions were pronounced, in 1853, to be "of dangerous tendency, and calculated to unsettle the minds of the theological students." Farrar also received much abuse for similar views, and his "liberality of thought," according to one of his biographers, "barred his elevation to the episcopate." He confessed, however, that the Scriptural teaching contained what seemed to be "irreconcilable antinomies," and that the subject of future punishment was "full of difficulty and mystery." The late Dr. Illingworth was conservative and cautious, and inclined to the belief in everlasting punishment "on the ground of its long and wide prevalence in the Church," but he drew a distinction between "punishment" and "torment," observing that "the horrible pictures of everlasting torment" had "not a shred of justification in the pages of the New Testament." Some candidly admit that the Bible texts are ambiguous. A clergyman of our own day, the Rev. J. D. Jones of Bourne-mouth, expresses his opinion as follows: "I will quite frankly confess," he says, "that Scripture gives us no plain and unmistakable guidance. There are texts that may be quoted on the one side, and texts that may be quoted on the other." Dean Inge definitely states that we are justified in believing that "all creation" will be saved, but he does not seem to base this belief

on the letter of Scripture. The Rev. J. R. Cohu (in his *Vital Problems of Religion*) does not think it worth while to discuss what he calls "the hell of popular superstition," and says that the mere thought of such a hell is "blasphemy against God." The Bishop of Hereford (in his *Liberty of Prophesying*) observes that "the masses of Protestant Christians are still intensely and intractably materialistic in their eschatological beliefs"; but why does he blame the masses, seeing that they merely believed what they were taught by the clerical body of which the bishop himself happens to be an unusually enlightened member? The Rev. Dr. A. E. Garvie (in *The Missionary Obligation*, published in 1914) says that when he was a boy "it was thought a heresy of the deepest dye to question or doubt the everlasting duration of future penalty for all who did not die believing in Christ. . . . One cannot but wonder how those who seriously entertained it could find any comfort, joy, or hope in life, and still more how they could hold that the God who could so deal with His creatures was love. . . . The individualism of the older evangelicalism is yielding to-day to a universalism which recognizes that the salvation of all is necessary to the completeness of the salvation of each." The Rev. R. J. Campbell (since his return to the Church of England) has published a pamphlet called *What is Hell?* in which he supports the hypothesis of an "intermediate purificatory state," for the existence of which the Biblical evidence is, I fear, hardly convincing; and he adds, "there is nothing in the New Testament to justify anyone in declaring that the punishment of any single soul is everlasting."

Mr. Frederick Spencer, in his recent book *The Mean-*



*ing of Christianity*, is very outspoken. "Of all gods since the world began," he says, "the Christian God has been represented as in effect the most unjust, the most cruel. . . . Of all iniquities, the doctrine of eternal punishment is the greatest. It is the vilest sin that has stained mankind." When we find that Christians can, with impunity, express themselves with such vigour as this, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the "damnable heresies" of a few generations ago are gradually turning the tables on the old orthodoxies. It was a member of the medieval Universalist sect of the Catharists who declared that if he could only get hold of "the false and perfidious God of the Catholics, who created a thousand men in order to save a single one and damn all the rest, he would break him in pieces and tear him asunder with his nails and spit in his face." History repeats itself. The Catharists are a mere memory, but to-day we have with us Mr. H. G. Wells, who makes his Mr. Britling express his attitude towards the God of Christian orthodoxy in words that are singularly reminiscent of those used by the plain-spoken Catharist. "Why! if I thought there was an omnipotent God who looked down on battles and deaths and all the waste and horror of this war—able to prevent these things—doing them to amuse himself—I would spit in his empty face." Few of our modern Universalists speak with the blunt candour of the Catharists and Mr. Wells, nor do they talk about coming to fisticuffs with the Deity; but they are equally positive that if God is all that Orthodoxy represents him to be he may indeed command and compel our obedience, but is utterly unworthy of our worship or our love.

In Catholic France, as in Protestant England, men long ago began to grow restive under the Christian doctrine of hell, and if the subject has been debated there with less liveliness than among ourselves this is merely because the doctrine of purgatory tends to thrust that of hell into the background. It is interesting to note that Universalism was taught in the short-lived religion founded by that remarkable man Guillaume Monod, who died in 1896, and who, had his environment been more suitable than it was for the reception of a new "revelation," might well have come to be hailed as one of the world's greatest religious teachers. In 1845 he published an article in which he calculated the numbers of those who according to Protestant doctrine (which, of course, recognizes no purgatory) were condemned to everlasting torment. He purposely kept his figures low in order to protect himself against the charge of exaggeration. "I suppose," he says, "that in the time of the Apostles there were about 10,000 Christians among 100,000,000 inhabitants of the world; thus for every man saved, 10,000 went to hell. To-day, assuming that there are about 1,000,000,000 inhabitants of the earth, and at most 1,000,000 true Christians (that is, Christians 'converted' in the technical Protestant sense), there are 1,000 men damned for each man saved. It has been calculated that one man dies every second, 3,600 every hour, 86,400 every day. Of these 86,400 souls there are more than 86,300 who die unconverted." Basing his estimate on the orthodox doctrine which he repudiated, he observed that during the past eighteen centuries (only a small fraction of the time man has lived on



this globe) thirty thousand million souls have been sent to hell.

With reference to Monod's estimate of the number of souls eternally lost, I may invite your attention to a statement published in the official organ of the C.I.M. in August 1911. We are told that during the last century, which was marked by great missionary effort, "it has been roughly computed that, while three or four million souls have been brought to Christ, there has been a growth of population of something like two hundred millions of mankind, and an increase of seventy-fold of the darkness over the light." Now according to the C.I.M. all these two hundred millions, less the three or four millions "brought to Christ," have gone to everlasting damnation; and that is, of course, but a small portion of the total number of souls which, during the last century alone, have been doomed to everlasting wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Not long ago, says the Rev. A. S. Peake (in his book on *The Bible*, 1913, p. 429), "the appeal used to ring out on missionary platforms that the heathen were dropping into hell at the rate of sixty a minute, because the Church had not sent the Gospel to them."

Dr. Peake describes this doctrine as one of "blood-curdling brutality," but he frankly admits that it was involved in the logic of the theological position of those who held that without belief in Christ there could be no salvation. Now does the C.I.M. seriously maintain that a creed which contains a divine revelation of this appalling nature deserves to be described as "glad tidings of great joy"? If so, would it be possible, do you think, to persuade the C.I.M. to impart to us its conception of *bad* tidings?

## LETTER II

A PROFESSOR of English in an American University has recently stated that in all his experience as a University teacher he has come across only three male students who believed in an eternal hell. The reasons given to him for the disbelief were various, but may be summed up in two conclusions: "a perfect God could not countenance eternal torture"; and "God could not be considered victorious and perfect as long as suffering and rebellion existed in his universe." These young collegians were almost unanimous in their certitude "that *all* souls will finally reach the condition known as heaven." (*The Hibbert Journal*, January 1917, p. 300.)

This statement concerning the beliefs of educated young America will doubtless be as pleasing to yourself as heart-breaking to the C.I.M. It affords a very striking proof of the rapidity with which, in this irreverent age, the grip of religious tradition is slackening, and of the powerlessness of the orthodox pulpits to stem the revolutionary current.

There are men still living who remember the panic that was caused in religious circles in England when a number of clergymen published the book entitled *Essays and Reviews*. A prominent archdeacon spoke of it as being incomparably the worst book he had ever seen in any language, and declared that through its

influence young men were being "tainted and corrupted and thrust almost to hell." One of the contributors to that famous or infamous book was the Rev. H. B. Wilson, who timidly and guardedly suggested that "all, both small and great, shall find a refuge in the bosom of the Universal Parent, to repose, or to be quickened into higher life." For this opinion, among others, he was tried for heresy and sentenced to a year's suspension from his living. Wilson and one of his fellow-essayists who had been similarly condemned appealed to the Privy Council, and Lord Chancellor Westbury, in reversing the sentence, uttered the famous judgment whereby everlasting punishment was ruled to be an open question. You doubtless remember the witty epitaph composed for Westbury, wherein it was said that he "dismissed Hell with costs" and "took away from orthodox members of the Church of England their last hope of everlasting damnation." In spite of Westbury, however, there were many who still remained hopeful; and indeed it is evident that both outside and inside the Anglican Church the "last hope of everlasting damnation" is by no means extinguished yet. After Westbury's judgment had been given amid the subdued applause of the general public, the clergy vainly tried, through the famous Dr. Pusey, to re-establish their discredited dogma. A declaration was drawn up, under Dr. Pusey's guidance, in which full belief was expressed in the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures "as not only containing, but being, the Word of God." It also affirmed that according to "the words of our blessed Lord" the punishment of "the cursed," no less than the life of the "righteous," would last for ever. Every clergyman in the country

was urged to sign this declaration "for the love of God"; but the 11,000 signatures which were appended to it were won "perhaps less by the love of God," as an able historian has remarked, "than by the fear of man." We are told a great deal nowadays about the wickedness of University professors—English as well as German; it is interesting, therefore, to note that professors were nearly as ready then as they are now to defy orthodox and conventional opinion. Of forty Oxford professors only nine signed Pusey's declaration, and of twenty-nine Cambridge professors only one.

That is an old story now, and if a twentieth-century Dr. Pusey were to issue a similar declaration to-day it is improbable that even a single professor would be prepared to court ridicule by appending his signature, though possibly a score or two of the clergy might be induced to do so. For other allies he would find himself obliged to appeal to the Church of Rome and to such bodies as the Salvation Army, the Plymouth Brethren, and the C.I.M. Dr. Inge, after giving his powerful support to the Universalist theory, not only escapes all ecclesiastical censure, but is appointed to the deanery of St. Paul's; writers and preachers like the Rev. Mr. Cohu, the Bishop of Hereford, and Dr. Garvie dismiss the beliefs of the once revered Dr. Pusey as mere superstition; and the Rev. R. J. Campbell gives utterance to Universalist views in terms which, had he been a contemporary of the Essayists and Reviewers, would assuredly have proved an effectual barrier to his return from Nonconformity to the Church of England. Turning from the clergy to the laity, we have seen that Mr. Wells, through the mouth of one of his own characters, talks about spitting in the empty face of

the god of orthodoxy: and instead of being unceremoniously hurried off to the stake at Smithfield he is conducted by a host of admirers to an honoured place among the social and religious teachers and prophets of this age of anarchy and iconoclasm.

Yet the Universalists and Neo-Christians and Invisible Deists are not going to carry everything before them without vigorous protests from those who cling to the old beliefs. Even so liberal a thinker as Von Hügel declares that the idea of "the Final Restitution of all Things and Souls—as taught by Clement and Origen—is not, at bottom, compatible with the whole drift, philosophy, and tone (even apart from specific sayings) of our Lord." As a loyal Catholic (though with strong Modernist sympathies) he even goes so far as to suggest or imply that the doctrine of an everlasting hell "answers to the deepest postulates and aspirations of the most complete and delicate ethical and spiritual senses!" (*The Mystical Element of Religion*, vol. ii. p. 219. See also p. 228.)

Quite recently a book has been issued under the title of *The New Pelagianism*. It bears an episcopal imprimatur, and it provides what I suppose is the Romanist answer to the moral problem which I propounded in my first letter (pp. 5–7). "The Christian Church, the Christian doctrine, is *semper eadem*. No matter whether the doctrine is repellent, is repugnant to human thought or human sentiment, the Church can allow no difference. This is Christianity. Mankind may accept or reject. But if the faith is to alter, it ceases to be the faith of the Christian tradition, it is no longer the Gospel preached by Christ." The author of this delectable book (J. Herbert Williams) goes on to say that by the

Church's teaching "any mortal sin unrepented of, be it only one single act, means everlasting damnation"; and he gives us the cheerful intelligence that in the Gospel "those who are damned appear as the majority of mankind." Similar utterances from the same (Roman Catholic) standpoint may also be gleaned from the pages of such carefully censored journals as *The Tablet*. In its issue of October 11, 1913, this journal makes the following observation: "Living in a very soft age, men easily persuade themselves that, as they put it, if God is love, there cannot be a hell. Yet the language of Scripture is unmistakable. It is clear that the punishment of mortal sin will last for ever. . . . The same duration is ascribed to Heaven and to Hell, and there is no difficulty in accepting the words literally with regard to Heaven." I may also refer you to the "profession of faith" which Cardinal Vaughan, in 1900, called upon Dr. St. George Mivart to sign, after the latter had published certain heretical articles in two monthly reviews. One of the statements to which he was called upon to signify his adherence was as follows: "I firmly believe and profess that the souls of men after death will be judged by God, and that those who are saved will 'go into everlasting life' (Matt. xxv. 46), and those who are condemned 'into everlasting punishment.' I reject as false and heretical all doctrines which teach that the souls in Hell may eventually be saved, or that their state in Hell may be one which is not of punishment. (Cf. Constitution of Council of Lateran, iv.)"

Probably your friends of the C.I.M. would disdain to lean for support on Roman Catholic theologians. I happen to know something of the peculiar nature of

that "Christian charity" which characterizes the relations between the C.I.M. and the predominant partner in the holy company of Christian societies! But if they feel obliged to refuse to strengthen their case by the citation of "Papist" testimony, they need have no qualms about accepting that of a Protestant clergyman with whom most of them would probably be proud to claim spiritual kinship. I refer to the Rev. George Gordon Macleod, whose edifying discourse on "Hell" is now before me. This pillar of Protestant orthodoxy protests indignantly, like the Romanist author of *The New Pelagianism*, against the softness of our present age and the growing tendency to disbelieve in the precious doctrine of everlasting damnation. "The God of Abraham," says Mr. Macleod, "used to thunder in his ire. He ruled with rod of iron, and dashed to pieces sinning nations like a potter's vessel. But our modern God has no iron in his constitution. He has sheathed his sword, and doffed the cap of doom, and sat down helpless in heaven, an indulgent weakling. . . . That is the popular god, and I, for one, refuse to worship him; for I have nothing to do with the creation of man's wishes, but with the God of the Bible. . . . 'I am Jehovah, I change not,' is a word that smites modern thought and popular infidelity right on the cheekbone and teeth, and will one day put an end to all unbelief in His power to punish—in Hell. The reign of iron lasts still! The same God who hurled oceans over Alps and Andes, drowning a world, and scorched Sodom to cinders in a hurricane of fire, and choked the streets of Jericho with corpses, and threw the Roman dogs on Jerusalem, to tear it limb from limb until, in



wild struggle of darkness and fire, a nation found its grave—reigns still! The same God who cursed Cain, and sent remorse upon Esau, and dug a grave for Korah, flung Jezebel to the dogs, and slew Belshazzar at his own banquet-table, and hurried Judas to a suicide's eternity—reigns still, unchanged for ever; and what He has done before He can do again. . . . I totally refuse to have anything to do with your india-rubber god, whom you can spit at and live, for he is not the God of this Bible. . . . I scout him from my soul as the Devil's god and yours. . . . If hell is not proven I deny the truth of God *in toto*; and, ere I finish, I am prepared to impeach the prophets and apostles as liars, and Jesus Christ as the biggest impostor that ever trod God's earth. . . . We are treated to some fine new theories of the future of wicked men nowadays. *Universalism* (or the devil's theory of hell), with the blindest of smiles, comes up to tell us that all alive, saint and sinner, will turn up in heaven at last! . . . This theory is not often boldly avowed, but secretly believed, I am convinced, it generally is; and, by God's help, I will blast your soul-damning heresy to-day. . . . If there is no hell, there is no heaven. They have the same foundation—God's truth—and if hell be a fable, heaven is a fable, too! There is as much proof in this Bible for a hell as for a heaven. . . . Drown the fires of hell, and you drown the music of heaven. . . . The plan of redemption is one. Take hell out of it, and the whole scheme is a dead failure. . . . The eternity of punishment and the divinity of Jesus stand or fall together. Jesus was not God if there is no hell. . . . There is no death in hell. . . . Death, which is a monster on



earth, would be an angel in hell. If Death went there, all the damned would fall down and worship him, and a shout of triumph rend the fiery vault till all was still! . . . I warn you, decent and respectable sinners, you shall be turned into hell. . . . Your decency is damning you while it keeps you from Jesus. The harlots and the publicans shall go into heaven before you who make a Christ of your morality."

The concluding sentence of this extraordinary product of Christian piety indicates, I may note, the survival of that venerable theory, once widely held in Christendom, that the virtues are but "splendid vices" or "filthy rags" if unaccompanied by a belief in Christ. Even Pascal was a victim of this pitiful delusion. "Without Jesus Christ," said Pascal, "man *must* be a creature of vice and misery; with Him he is delivered from both. In Him is all our virtue and all our happiness; apart from Him is nothing but vice, misery, error, darkness, death, despair. Not only is it impossible, it would be useless to know God otherwise than through Jesus Christ. We know God only by Jesus Christ. Without this Mediator all communication with God is barred."

Whatever may be thought about the unnecessary vigour and lack of delicacy of the Rev. Mr. Macleod's language, it would be hardly fair for Christians to blame or ridicule him for his notions of God and Hell. They are practically identical with the doctrines which have been held by countless learned and devout Christians in past centuries, and they are based on those writings which all Christians, including yourself, believe to be divinely inspired. His picture of the God worshipped

by him is not a very engaging one, but who can deny that it is a substantially correct account, as far as it goes, of the Old Testament Jahveh? The Abbé Loisy's description in his *Religion of Israel* (Eng. trans., 1910, pp. 100-5) may be more choice in its language, but the god portrayed by Loisy is not a whit more attractive or lovable than Mr. Macleod's Jehovah. It is only fair to M. Loisy, however, to admit that he does not share Mr. Macleod's admiration and reverence for that capricious, vindictive, and irascible deity.

Dr. Gore, the present Bishop of Oxford, in his recent little book on *The Religion of the Church*, condemns Universalism—the belief that every created spirit will be finally saved—no less emphatically than Mr. Macleod, though his language is considerably less trenchant and impetuous than that of his Scottish fellow-Christian. He says that Universalism is “flatly contrary, plainly contrary to the language used by our Lord about the destinies of men, and generally to the language of the New Testament,” though he hesitates to say that Christians are “absolutely shut up” into what he admits to be the “almost intolerable belief in unending conscious torment for the lost.” He seems to incline towards the theory of “conditional immortality,” and to the belief that utterly depraved souls may finally be annihilated; though he does not mention the fact that in the fifth century the doctrine of the complete annihilation of evil was rejected by the Church as heretical.<sup>1</sup> In any case the Last Judgment men-

<sup>1</sup> See Von Hugel, *The Mystical Element of Religion*, vol. ii. pp. 228-9, for some interesting remarks on this subject. He cites Goethe, Richard Rothe, and Heinrich Holtzmann as being among the modern upholders of the theory of “conditional

tioned in the New Testament "leaves men," he says, "divided into saved and lost," and he does not think it is possible to attach any other sense to "the tremendous language of the New Testament" than that wrongdoing "may bring the soul to a spiritual ruin so complete as to become final and irrecoverable."

This view, which is also that supported by the Rev. F. C. Kempson in his book *The Future Life and Modern Difficulties*, has met with severe criticism from a writer in the *Church Quarterly Review* (see the issue for April 1909, p. 200). He points out that "a universe where there was an ultimate loss of souls through the complete determination of the will towards evil would be an essentially atheistic universe, for it would be one in which the evil was in the end partially triumphant over the good." This, I think, is a very sensible criticism, but doubtless Bishop Gore and Mr. Frost and other believers in final and irrecoverable damnation will continue to ignore this point of view, and persist in contrasting the alleged optimism of Christianity with the alleged pessimism of "heathen" religions.

Lecky spoke truly when in his *History of European Morals* he said that such doctrines as that of everlasting torture "surpass in atrocity any tenets that have ever been admitted into any pagan creed." The adoption of such tenets, he remarks, "might well lead men to doubt the universality of moral perceptions. Such teaching is, in fact, simply demonism, and demonism in its most extreme form." Yet Christian missionaries

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immortality." Von Hügel himself thinks it "cannot be far from the truth," but regards it, "taken in its strictness," as untenable.

repeatedly refer to the "demonism" of China as if it were something peculiar to "heathendom"! It has been asserted by a "devoted missionary" (for so he is described in a foreword to his own book) that in China "the little children live in dread of the pictures of the Buddhist hells shown by the mendicant priests." I have had many years of intercourse with the Chinese peasantry, and have probably had a wider personal experience of the habits and customs of the Buddhist monkhood than any Christian evangelist; yet I never came across a Buddhist monk in China who showed pictures of the Buddhist purgatories (Buddhism has no everlasting hell) to little children, nor have I ever heard Chinese parents complain that their little ones "lived in dread" of such things. The missionary who has made the assertion just quoted is W. Remfry Hunt (see his *Heathenism under the Searchlight*, 1908, p. 41). If it were true that Buddhist monks were in the habit of terrifying little children with pictures of hell, I should cordially agree with Mr. Hunt in his suggestion that such creatures are unworthy of being called men. But when he goes on to declare that a person of this kind "could not be placed anywhere in Christendom without his being looked upon as a monster, or as a curiosity," thereby implying that Christendom knows nothing of such people, I venture to question whether he is as fully acquainted as he ought to be with the habits of Christian priests and preachers. If he were to turn to the pages of his Buckle or his Lecky he would speedily discover that both Catholic priests and Protestant parsons have covered themselves and their religion with shame and infamy by the systematic cruelty with which they have stained and wounded the

tender minds of children with their ghastly tales of the punishments that may be awaiting them in hell. To-day I have chanced to light upon a passage by a lay writer in a recent number of the *Nineteenth Century and After* (February 1917, p. 380). "No decorous language," he says, "is equal to the emergency in dealing with the criminal folly of those *who terrify children* and insult God by describing burning tortures to be inflicted for ever on hapless victims of Providential atrocities." Missionaries like Mr. Hunt, who are so ready to heap abuse and insults on religions other than their own, and upon the priests of those religions, should remember not only that inutterable cruelties have been committed in the past by Christian priests and ministers, but that these cruelties were perpetrated on persons who were obliged to submit to their ghostly ministrations or run the risk of being tortured to death on charges of heresy or apostasy.

Referring to the efforts made by the Romanist clergy to foster their hideous demonism among the ignorant masses, Lecky remarks that probably few Englishmen "are aware of the infamous publications written with this object, that are circulated by the Catholic priests among the poor." He goes on to refer to a tract "for children and young persons" called *The Sight of Hell*, by the Rev. J. Furniss. His quotations from this work are of so revolting a character that I will spare you the repetition of them, and in any case you probably know the work, for many writers have quoted from it.

I am not competent to say whether Father Furniss's pamphlet does or does not give a correct portrayal of the character of the Christian deity; that is a question

which Christians alone can decide. Others may at least deduce from the book some idea of the true character of the writer himself; and they will, I think, agree with me that Father Furniss was the last person whom a wise parent ought to have entrusted with the custody of his child's body or with the nurture of his soul. Mr. C. T. Gorham has justly remarked concerning Father Furniss's tract that "a Church which can allow such a work to be circulated by authority among children stands self-condemned as outraging the sentiment of humanity and blaspheming the Deity it claims to reverence." Perhaps the most stupefying remark in the passage quoted by Lecky is the sentence which follows a horrifying description of a child's sufferings in hell—*God was very good to this child*. No wonder Lecky says in another passage that Christian priests have ascribed to God "acts which are, in fact, considerably worse than any that theologians have attributed to the Devil." A doubt might even be expressed as to whether the Devil himself, if he exists, can be much inferior to men of Father Furniss's stamp in delicacy of moral perception.

"Even Satan's self with thee might dread to dwell  
And in thy skull discern a deeper hell."

Protestants, however, cannot flatter themselves that their own conceptions of their Deity are always of a much loftier kind than those of the benighted Catholics, or less likely to terrify little children. I have given you extracts from the Rev. Mr. Macleod's lurid dissertation on the subject, and it is as well to remember that Mr. Macleod was merely carrying on a familiar Protestant tradition. I think it was Hazlitt who told how some

Kidderminster women once nearly stoned a parson to death for declaring from his pulpit that "hell was paved with infants' skulls." If indignation and wrath can ever be righteous, I hope you will agree with me that it was righteous in the case of these ladies of Kidderminster. The anecdote suggests the reflexion that if women had not been debarred by the man-made and man-ruled Church from helping to build up its creed and to shape its doctrines, we should have had a far more humane Christianity, a Christianity far more worthy of the name of a "religion of love," than that which we have actually received from the hands of celibate priests and sour-minded and devil-haunted Puritan fanatics.

It was in the house of a missionary in China that I first came across a well-thumbed copy of Richard Baxter's famous book *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*—a book which, according to one of his biographers, "will always command the grateful admiration of pious readers." That eminent Puritan divine, whom Dean Stanley called "the chief of English Protestant schoolmen," makes the following cheerful remarks about the Almighty's direct responsibility for the torments of hell and the gratification which he derives from observing the anguish of his victims. "The exceeding greatness of such torments may appear by considering the principal author of them, who is God himself; the place or state of torment; that these torments are the fruit of Divine vengeance; that the Almighty takes pleasure in them; that Satan and sinners themselves shall be God's executioners; that these torments shall be universal, without mitigation and without end."

Baxter was by no means peculiar in these views,



Halyburton, in his book *The Great Concern of Salvation*, after describing the torments of hell, also announced that the "contriver of these torments" was no other than "Infinite Wisdom"; and a clergyman named Hutcheson is quoted by Buckle in his *Civilization in England* as distinctly imputing to the Deity "a sensation of pleasure in injuring even the innocent." The clergy of seventeenth-century Scotland "boasted," says Buckle, "that it was their special mission to thunder out the wrath and curses of the Lord. In their eyes the Deity was not a beneficent being, but a cruel and remorseless tyrant. They declared that all mankind, a very small portion only excepted, were doomed to eternal misery." These horrible men even went so far as to declare that before the Almighty's attention was engaged with the creation of the world and of man he occupied his leisure in the preparation and completion of hell, "so that, when the human race appeared it might be ready for their reception."

Among Protestant sects of the present day I suppose few cling more devotedly to a belief in hell than the Plymouth Brethren, some of whom are engaged in evangelistic work among the Chinese in my immediate neighbourhood. A tract issued by this sect is now before me, and from it I select one or two fragments of the "glad tidings" with which it seeks to awaken unbelievers to a sense of their guilt and to frighten children into a recognition of the Christian Deity as the God of Love. "It is a solemn thing for a man to stand up and say you are all lost. And that is what Christianity tells us is the state of all by nature." The author then proceeds to quote the texts upon which Christianity



bases its knowledge of the horrible fate of the unconverted, and says of Revelation xxi. 8 that it is "the final, solemn warning of Him who sits on the throne. It is the Lord speaking from heaven." He addresses himself to the question of hell's existence, and after answering it with a decided affirmative he asks two further questions: (1) Will the body suffer in hell as well as the soul? (2) Will hell be everlasting? His reply is that the "solemn words" of Jesus compel us to say "yes" to both questions. Then he proceeds to ask, "Is a belief in hell necessary to salvation?" and in capital letters he answers, "IT CERTAINLY IS." Why? Because "the Saviour" has said so. Jesus was "God manifest in the flesh," and "if we refuse to believe Him, we make Him a liar!" Hence "*no one can deny*" the existence of hell "*and be saved.*" (The italics are in the original.) He refers to a "pastor Russell," who appears to have held Universalist views similar to your own, and sums up his opinion of this heretic in these forcible words (reinforced with capital letters), "the plain, simple, damning fact is, Pastor Russell CONTRADICTS THE LORD."

Your ideas about God and about Hell may differ very considerably from those of Vaughan, Furniss, Macleod, Baxter, and the Plymouth Brethren, and also (less widely) from those of Gore, Inge, and Campbell, but the more their views differ from yours and from one another's, the more remarkable is it that you should all profess to derive your notions from the same infallible source. What are we to say about an inspired book that lends itself, in the hands of thoroughly well-intentioned and devout investigators, to such varying and incompatible

interpretations? And again I ask you in all earnestness, What course is to be adopted by those who fully share your dismay at the doctrine of divinely-ordained everlasting punishment, but nevertheless find themselves reluctantly compelled, after as conscientious an examination of the sacred text as you yourself have carried out, to agree with those learned, devout, and orthodox theologians, Roman and Protestant, who hold that the appalling doctrine which has aroused your most justifiable abhorrence is clearly and unequivocally set down in the Bible?

## LETTER III

It is doubtful whether any means exist whereby the Rev. Mr. Frost and other staunch believers in an everlasting hell could be made to see their creed in its true hideousness ; it should not be impossible, however, to devise some means of testing the strength of their convictions, and perhaps the severity of the tests might compel them to relax, to some extent, the rigidity of their religious ideas. It would be interesting, for example, to know whether they would remain true to their conceptions of the truth, and dare to state their beliefs without either ambiguity or reserve, if they were sent as chaplains to one of the war-fronts and brought into contact with non-Christian troops—natives of India or Egypt or Morocco. Let us give a loose rein to our imaginations and assume that Mr. Frost, at the head of a chosen band of his disciples from the C.I.M., is addressing some of these men just before a great battle, and that he has been vainly making a last attempt to bring the horror of their spiritual situation before their mental vision. Shorn of all euphemisms, equivocations, and discreet reticences, the address might take a form something like this :—

“ We Christians have asked you heathen to come and help us to defeat our enemies in battle ; and for your willingness to do this, and for the courage

and loyalty displayed by you, we offer you our grateful thanks. At the same time we, like you, have a duty to perform, and our duty is to warn you that, unless you can be persuaded to accept Christ during the few hours or days that you may have to live, you are doomed to everlasting perdition. Your friends and relatives who fought and died so nobly last week while charging the enemy's trenches have already, we regret to inform you, been condemned to the flaming pit, and are now writhing in agony which, by the decree of the ever-loving and most merciful God, will last for ever. Their sufferings, like those in store for yourselves, are such that compared with them the agony of the wounded on the field of battle is like lying on a bed of lilies. You yourselves will shortly be ordered to make an attack, and it is quite certain that a great many of you will be killed. Those who are killed, being heathen, will assuredly be damned. You are about to plunge into a man-made hell on earth; but its horrors are as nothing when compared with the everlasting hell into which you will plunge later on. It is a matter of sincere regret to us that we cannot give you a more cheerful send-off, and we admit that our words are hardly calculated to stimulate either your loyalty or your martial enthusiasm. But just as it is your duty to fight, and to die if necessary, for the cause of the Christians who are employing you, so it is our duty to inform you of the only condition on which you can possibly escape everlasting torture. As none of you appear to be willing to accept our counsel, we are obliged to break to you the painful intelligence that you are all under sentence of damnation. It seems rather hard, perhaps, that we Christians should ask you to come and fight for us, and that, having fought and died for us, large numbers of you should then

be sent to hell. It may possibly console you, however, to know that you would have certainly gone to hell in any case sooner or later; and that as your torments will last for ever it really matters very little whether they begin to-morrow or a few years hence. After a few trillion centuries of torture (which will bring you no nearer to the end than you are to-day) you will realize that it is of no consequence whether you entered hell after seventy years or after only twenty years of earthly life. Meanwhile, you must try and cheer up in spite of our not very encouraging exhortation, because it is above all things necessary that you should do your utmost to help us Christians to win this war. By winning the war we hope to have ever-increasing opportunities of spreading the glad tidings of Christianity among your heathen countrymen; and it may, or should, comfort you to know that, though your own damnation is irrevocably fixed, we may possibly be able, partly as a result of your courage and loyalty to us, to destroy the false religions invented by the Devil and accepted by your deluded ancestors (all of whom you will meet in hell), and to save the souls of some of your children by inducing them to believe the glad tidings which you so contumaciously reject. Your death may, in fact, be of great practical use to us in that you will be unable to thwart us in our future efforts to lead your families into the way of salvation; and we assure you that we intend to take full advantage of the new opportunities for Christian evangelization that we may obtain as a result of this war.<sup>1</sup> Your officers are

<sup>1</sup> This has been frequently insisted upon by writers in the missionary journals since the war began, and similar views and hopes have been set forth in the columns of ordinary newspapers. *The Times* (Literary Supplement, August 24, 1916) tells us that "Foreign Missions are coming to their own. . . . Who knows

about to give you the word of command to go over the parapet. Charge the enemy with a stout heart. We cannot commend you to God, for that would be blasphemy, as he has already disowned you and consigned you to the Devil; nor can we say God-speed, for it is Satan, not God, who is your master. If you survive, we will make another effort, though we fear it will be a hopeless one, to convert you to our holy and joyous creed; if you are killed we cannot, indeed, pity you—for that would mean that we questioned God's perfect love and justice in condemning you to everlasting pain and woe; but you may depend on us to make the best possible use of you as a horrible warning to others, and we shall not fail, if we have the chance, to describe your sufferings in hell to the little children whom you may leave behind in your heathen home."

I venture to say that in this imaginary address to "heathen" troops there is nothing whatever, in principle, which is inconsistent with the appalling creed openly and joyously professed by Mr. Frost and those for whom he speaks in the C.I.M. Doubtless they would complain of its excessive candour, its want of

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but that through this war a new era may open for all Christian missions throughout the world?" See also the "Open Letter to the Laymen of the Christian Church in Great Britain," signed by twenty-eight influential laymen belonging to various Christian denominations, and published in *The Times* of November 27, 1914. The writers looked forward to "a great national movement of enlistment under the banner of Christ" to take place after the war, and hoped that this movement would mean "the dawn of a new day in missionary history." They referred to the paramount necessity of extending and establishing "the world-wide Kingdom of God, which is the only sure foundation of peace"

tact, or its indiscreet disclosure of Christian "mysteries"; but Mr. Frost will hardly deny, I think, that it is in substantial conformity with his own doctrinal position, and that it merely states in blunt, unambiguous language certain "fundamental, necessary, and essential" truths of the Christian religion as he understands it.

I fear that very much in these letters will be highly distasteful to you, because, after all, you yourself are a convinced Christian and a believer in an "eternal" (defined as "age-long") though not in an "everlasting" hell. That theologians and orthodox Christians must believe, or profess to believe, in a hell of some kind, goes without saying. To cease to believe in hell would be equivalent to a surrender of the Bible. This being so, it is a remarkable fact that educated men and women in Western Christendom treat the question, as a rule, with complete indifference; and the clergy, more often than not, are now recognizing this indifference on the part of their flocks by a discreet avoidance of the whole subject. My experience is that the clergy of to-day show a very significant anxiety, when hell is mentioned, to talk about something else. If pressed, Anglicans will usually take refuge in the statement that the Church of England does not *authoritatively* teach the existence of an everlasting hell, as it was excluded from the Thirty-nine Articles. One such clergyman expresses the opinion (in a letter to me) that the doctrine "would appear to have been introduced at the Reformation"! Like many Anglo-Catholics of to-day he would like to saddle the Protestants with the unpleasant features of Christianity; but in this case I fear the attempt must fail. The Fourth Council



of Lateran (1215) gave a clear decision on the subject, and the doctrine is, as I have already stated, *de fide* in the Church of Rome at this day. In proof of this I will quote from *The Students' Catholic Doctrine*, by Charles Hart, published this year (1917) with the usual imprimatur. "It is of Faith that there is a Hell; that its duration is eternal; and that the wicked will there be tormented for ever in company with the devil and the lost angels. Our Lord Himself has told us this in the terrible doom that He will pass on the reprobate immediately after the Last Judgment: 'Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matt. xxv. 41)."

Modern apologists may perhaps argue that the theory of everlasting damnation, if not borrowed from pre-Christian religious thought, was at least anticipated in it. Even if this were strictly true it would not affect the question. We are not inquiring into the sources of Christian dogmas—some of which have a lowlier origin than most Christians care to admit—but merely criticizing an article of the Christian faith which to the modern mind has become intolerably repulsive. In any case, it is very doubtful whether any true pre-Christian parallel exists. The Homeric Tartarus was a place of punishment, but Greek religion contained no dogma that the torments of the wicked would last for ever. Such a dogma would, indeed, have been inconsistent with the popular ideas connected with the theory of re-incarnation. In Plato's Dialogues, it is true, we are told that the incurably wicked will never emerge from Tartarus (οὐποτε ἐκβαίνουσιν)—but the fanciful stories of the under-world which Plato put into the mouth of Socrates in the *Phædo*, the *Gorgias*,



and the *Republic* cannot be regarded as forming part of any existing religious system. They are myths or parables, and were recognized as such by those for whose amusement or edification they were narrated. After expounding the *Phaedo* myth, Socrates is made to utter a warning against a too literal interpretation of what he had said. "A man of sense ought not to say, nor will I be very confident, that the description which I have given of the soul and her mansions is exactly true." He merely ventures to think that "something of the kind is true." A somewhat similar warning occurs in the *Meno* (86B) after the discussion of some of the doctrines of Pindar and other "inspired" poets. Jowett admitted that Plato's mythical scheme of next-world punishments was more merciful than that devised by Christian theologians (see his *Dialogues of Plato*, vol. ii. p. 176), and he adds that Plato "does not, like Dante or Swedenborg, allow himself to be deceived by his own creations" (p. 188). It should be added that Plato's conceptions of Tartarus are strictly *ethical*. It is the morally wicked who are to suffer there—especially the tyrants and potentates who have abused their power—not religious doubters or infidels or persons who have had no opportunity of forming correct opinions about the gods.

Sometimes Christian apologists attempt to minimize hell's importance by suggesting that very few human beings ever have been or can be sinful enough to qualify for admission. Such compromisers usually include Judas among the few who are wholly beyond hope of salvation. The term Semi-Universalism has been given to those whose theory of hell may be summed up in such words as these: "We believe in

hell, but we only know for certain of one man sent there" (quoted in *The New Pelagianism*, p. 98). Even Judas has his advocates and whitewashers in these degenerate days; for if you will refer to *The Interpreter* magazine for July 1907 you will find there an article by Mr. W. A. Cox, arguing that Judas was really a well-meaning person, and that he sincerely repented of the part played by him in the tragedy of the Passion. Another writer (George Barlow), discoursing pleasantly of Judas, has remarked that numerous people "who have won in the Christian Churches the titles and honours of saints, have outstripped him in unblushing and systematic lying"; and it is even suggested, with bold optimism, that Judas "may some day be born as a Redeemer upon some star even now barely swimming within the ken of our most powerful telescopes"—a notion which recalls the Buddhist idea that Yama, the demon-king of Purgatory, will, in some distant age, become a Buddha and a saviour of men.

There is another way by which many Protestants of otherwise sound orthodoxy try to mitigate the horrors of the Christian dogma of an everlasting hell. Their suggestion is that sinners who die unrepentant, and the "heathen" who have had no opportunity of "hearing the Gospel" in this life, may in the next world be given a chance of repentance and of hearing about Christ and "the way of salvation," and may thereby escape the doom of damnation. Among the quite recent exponents of this view are Dr. J. D. Jones in his sermon on *The Great Hereafter*, and S. J. Whitmee in his booklet *Hope for those who Die in Darkness*. Many people will be repelled by the very title of the latter book, which implies that all "infidels" and non-

Christians die in a state of "darkness"—a typically Christian assumption. In any case the theory is quite inconsistent with Catholic orthodoxy, which declares that a man's destiny is determined for all eternity by the state of his soul at the time of death. "At the moment the soul is separated from the body by death, it receives the judgment of irrevocable salvation or damnation." (*Catholic Doctrine and Discipline Simply Explained*, by Philip Bold, with an imprimatur by Cardinal Vaughan.) This latter is one of the numerous doctrines of orthodoxy which are becoming as incredible as that of eternal damnation. The Rev. Dr. Griffith Jones, for example, speaking at the London City Temple in April 1917, is stated to have publicly repudiated his former belief "in which most of us," he says, "were brought up," that every man's eternal destiny is settled by "whatever position he was in at the moment of death." (See the *London Times*, April 9, 1917.) He was a little premature, however, in his announcement that the doctrine in question "is dead and will never be resurrected." He evidently omitted to consult the Pope and the C.I.M.

It is highly improbable that any attempt at compromise between the believers and the disbelievers in an everlasting hell will give general satisfaction to bewildered Christians. Those within the Churches show a growing tendency, as I have remarked, to push hell into the background, as though they were ashamed of it. By modern writers outside the Churches it is usually mentioned in terms of ridicule or disgust. For example, Dr. Gilbert Murray, the distinguished Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford, who, I under-

stand, makes no secret of his disbelief in all the Christian orthodoxies, has expressed his opinion about the hell-doctrine in vigorous words which will doubtless sound startling in the ears of those who adhere to the traditional teachings. "Probably throughout history the worst things ever done in the world on a large scale by decent people have been done in the name of religion, and I do not think that has entirely ceased to be true at the present day. All the Middle Ages held the strange and, to our judgment, the obviously insane belief that the normal result of religious error was eternal punishment. . . . The record of early Christian and medieval persecutions which were the direct result of that one confident religious error comes curiously near to one's conception of the wickedness of the damned." (*Four Stages of Greek Religion*, p. 22.)

Dr. McTaggart says in *Some Dogmas of Religion* that "if the mass of Englishmen ceased to believe in any religion, many of them would lose much happiness by ceasing to believe in heaven, but many of them would gain much happiness by ceasing to believe in hell." It is certain, however, that religion will long outlive the belief in hell. One of the foremost living authorities on religious psychology—Dr. J. B. Pratt—remarks that "the most noticeable fact about the Christian doctrine of hell at the present time is that belief in it is rapidly disappearing. . . . For a very large number of Christian people, who are in other respects quite orthodox, hell has become a kind of *joke*." When religious beliefs become objects of mirth among their own nominal supporters we may be sure that their reign is over. The fact seems

to be that educated lay "Christians" to-day are not caring whether the Bible teaches everlasting damnation or not. They have made up their minds that the doctrine is a revolting one, and they refuse to believe it. It is rarely that we now hear people say "it is in the Bible, therefore it must be good and true." Any doctrine that their moral sense disapproves of is rejected without further enquiry; and if the Bible says it is true, so much the worse for the Bible.

Perhaps you have read the articles by "A Student in Arms" that appeared not long ago in *The Spectator*. Describing the attitude of the British soldiers in Flanders towards the questions of death and the here-after, the writer made this observation: "Very few men are afraid of death in the abstract. Very few men believe in Hell." *The Spectator* circulates widely among country parsons and loyal Christians of every denomination, all of whom are prompt to rush to the defence of their favourite dogmas when rude hands venture to assail them. It is of exceptional interest, therefore, that in this case only one reader wrote to complain of the statement that British soldiers disbelieved in hell. That reader was a Roman Catholic naval chaplain. In a letter of expostulation which appeared in the issue of November 11, 1916, he said that those who knew the facts of the case must have read the statement with amazement. "'The facts are,'" he said, "(1) that the majority of the combatants in the present war do believe in hell; (2) that among those who believe in hell are found the bravest men."

The characteristic coolness of the second assumption will not escape you. We are not told that *believers*

*in hell are among the bravest men*, which might or might not be true, but that *the bravest men are found among the believers in hell*. I wonder by what statistical or other method the reverend father discovered this fact!

To this letter, as it appeared in print, was appended the following editorial footnote: "The gallant Roman Catholic chaplain may be in the right as to the men of his own creed. We are convinced that he is wrong, and that 'A Student in Arms' is right, in regard to the majority of Protestant Englishmen."

As a matter of fact the statement made by the "Student in Arms" was neither new nor startling. The same opinion was expressed several years before the present war by the Rev. A. H. Craufurd, an Anglican clergyman who in 1909 published a book entitled *The Religion of H. G. Wells and other Essays*. "I have found while ministering to English soldiers," he says (p. 124), "that very few of them seem to have any *real* expectation of a future life. They speak of a dead comrade as being at rest in much the same way as they would speak of a dead horse." If this is the case with private soldiers, what is to be said about educated civilians? On this point let a distinguished philosopher be our witness. "Of most cultivated Christians," says F. C. S. Schiller, "it may be safely said their belief in hell is practically a very faint and unimportant factor in their life, and that in heaven fainter still." (*Riddles of the Sphinx*, 1910 ed. p. 363.) Benjamin Jowett said much the same thing. "Many sermons have been filled with descriptions of celestial or infernal mansions. But hardly even in childhood did the thought of heaven and hell supply the motives

of our actions, or at any time seriously affect the substance of our belief." (*Dialogues of Plato*, vol. ii. p. 176.)

I wonder whether your experience of the living faith of Christians leads you to accept the view of the "Student in Arms" and the writers last quoted, or whether your own staunch belief in hell prompts you to assume, with the Roman Catholic chaplain, that it is still sincerely shared by the majority of your fellow-Christians. Personally I am of opinion that the "Student in Arms" was right; and though the fact (if it be a fact) of the lack of belief in hell necessarily indicates the decay of orthodox Christianity and of the traditional faith in a divinely-inspired Bible, I feel convinced that it portends nothing but good for the future of both morals and religion.



## LETTER IV

SINCE writing the foregoing letters I have received your letter of June 17 (1917), together with the following pamphlets written by yourself, all of which I have read with interest.

*A Plea and a Protest.*

*Chinese Philosophy and the truth as it is in Jesus.*  
*The Spiritual Condition of the Heathen*, a Reply to  
the Rev. H. W. Frost.

*A Last Appeal*, an Open Letter to D. E. Hoste.

*Final Correspondence* between the General Director  
of the China Inland Mission, the Director of  
the North American Branch of the C.I.M., and  
S. P. Smith.

I observe from one of your pamphlets (*The Spiritual Condition of the Heathen*, p. 55) that a fellow-missionary has written to you saying that people who think as you think (namely, that hell-torments are not endless) are "blasphemers of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost"; and I share your surprise that, regarding you as a blasphemer, he should extend to you his "affectionate Christian regard." You say in the same passage that Mr. Frost, American Director of the C.I.M., shows similar inconsistency in assuring you that he never ceases to give you his "true esteem and affection in



Christ" in spite of his public declaration that it is "unwarrantable and dangerous" to have "fellowship in corporate service" with such people as yourself. I entirely agree with you that these inconsistencies are surprising. But I must venture to point out what I fear is a similar inconsistency on your own part. You say that you are quite ready to rejoin the C.I.M. and to co-operate with it in evangelistic work provided you are not compelled to subscribe to such of its tenets as you hold in abhorrence. Is it not strange that you should be willing to co-operate with men who, in spite of the fact that they "preach Christ crucified," maintain doctrines which you believe to be not only untrue but also hurtful to the cause of missions in China and to religion generally? (See your *Final Correspondence*, p. 4.) And is it not stranger still that you, a devout Christian, should express personal feelings of "friendship and goodwill" for a man who has publicly declared his unshakable faith in a dogma which in your opinion "brands the character of God with infinite disgrace"? (*Ibid.* pp. 4-5.)<sup>1</sup>

In my first letter (pp. 5-7) I propounded a moral problem. I asked what you would have done if, detesting the dogma of everlasting punishment as you do, your examination of the Scriptures had led you, as it has led countless other Christians, no less conscientious and devout than yourself, including Mr. Frost and Mr. Hoste and their followers in the C.I.M., to the honest conviction that the detested doctrine does, as a matter of fact, form part of the teaching of a book

<sup>1</sup> Cf. pp. 5-6, above.

which you believe to be or to contain the infallible utterances of the Almighty. I pointed out that the alternatives before you would apparently have been either to surrender your belief in the Bible as an infallible moral and doctrinal guide, or to ignore the testimony of your conscience, perhaps at ruinous moral cost to your own personality. You have not touched upon this matter in your letter, but your pamphlets make it only too clear what your answer would be. For example, on page 6 of your Reply to Mr. Frost you write thus : “ I care not to raise the question of God’s justice, but only to test any statement by Scripture ; and as Mr. Frost maintains that to perish is to endure *endless conscious suffering*, then I strenuously assert that the idea that God will permit *any one single creature* of His, be that one Satan, demon, or man, to suffer such a punishment, is an idea which is *utterly unscriptural*. Such a dogma as *endless* conscious suffering involves such unthinkable ‘ frightfulness,’ that it should be sustained by absolutely unassailable and incontrovertible scriptural proof, but I defy Mr. Frost to bring forward a *single* Scripture to prove it.” (The italics in my quotations from your pamphlets are your own.) All this clearly signifies that if unassailable scriptural authority *could* be produced for the dogma (and the vast majority of theologians have believed that it certainly can), then, rather than surrender your faith in a book, you would dutifully accept a teaching that proved your God to be a worker of “ unthinkable ‘ frightfulness.’ ” Again, on page 49 of the same pamphlet you imply that against the judgments of Scripture there can be no appeal. “ Now, reader, make your choice,” you say, “ and God help you to make

the scriptural and, *therefore*, right one." It apparently did not occur to you to say simply, "God help you to make the *true* one." Further, after making some wise and appropriate observations on the ghastliness of the conception of a literally "everlasting" hell, you proceed as follows: "I do not *in the least* raise the question of the justice or injustice of the above supposed procedure. Believing that 'God hath spoken' in Scripture, and that He is perfect in love and wisdom, the only question I care to raise is this: Is the above teaching *scriptural*? If it is, I am bound to loyally accept it. I should consider it the height of presumption and impiety to do otherwise." (*A Plea and a Protest*, p. 29.)

I fear there is no possibility of doubt that in your opinion the infallibility of the Bible must be maintained at all costs, and its teachings received with docility and reverence by every faithful Christian, even if they include teachings which disgrace God and involve Christianity in the profoundest pessimism. As for the unhappy believer in the orthodox view, he must, I suppose, content himself with such cold comfort as his Church can give him, and with the reflection that, being neither an infidel nor a heretic, he himself may reasonably expect to escape damnation. I must give the Church the credit of admitting, however reluctantly, that the dogma of an everlasting hell is not an agreeable one. In my second letter (pp. 19-20) I quoted some utterances on the subject from *The New Pelagianism* and *The Tablet*, and I may here add some equally cheerless words from a *Manual of Catholic Theology*. "We readily acknowledge," says the Romanist writer, "the difficulty of reconciling the

eternity of Hell with the existence of an infinitely merciful God, but the doctrine is taught so distinctly that we have to accept it, like other doctrines which we cannot understand." As far as I can gather, this point of view is Protestant as well as Catholic; and I am glad to see that your fellow-missionary, Dr. Goodrich (as quoted by you on page 7 of *A Plea and a Protest*), admits that even the modified conception of hell held by yourself is "still very dreadful." He wisely makes no attempt to reconcile it with the theory of a Deity who is both omnipotent and omnibenevolent, and concedes, like the writer in the *Catholic Manual*, that he is up against something that he does not understand.<sup>1</sup>

My reading of your pamphlets has been accompanied by a steadily growing realization that between our respective standpoints there is a profound chasm which nothing can bridge, and that on the moral and religious issues touched upon in these letters we can agree only to differ. Our irreconcilable views as to the position to be accorded to the Bible are sufficient in themselves to destroy all hope of profitable discussion. For you, the Bible is the inspired and infallible Word of God; for me, it is a human production, whence it follows that (like all things human) it contains errors and imperfections. To you, "one incontrovertible Scripture is worth a tome of human argument" (see your *Last Appeal*, p. 25); the intrinsic merits or demerits of this or that scriptural teaching are apparently a secondary consideration; if it is scriptural it is divine and infallible, and there is an end of the matter. I

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Introduction, pp. xiv-xvi.

wonder how or by what authority you know the Bible to be the infallible Word of God. How do you know that the Quinisextine Council (of the year 692) which first gave œcumenical sanction and recognition to the canon was divinely inspired to utter a correct decision in the matter? If those who at a still earlier date collected and authenticated the books of the canon were divinely safeguarded against error, how is it that they failed to detect and exclude passages which we now know to be forgeries and interpolations—some of them of great doctrinal importance? How do you account for the fact that (to use the words of Dr. Peake, Professor of Biblical Exegesis at Manchester) “passages which at one time were regarded as unquestionable portions of Scripture are now by common consent looked upon as spurious”? How is it that, to quote the same high authority, “men have often dogmatically asserted the verbal inspiration of a passage which is demonstrably corrupt”? Are you in a position to state definitely what books comprised the O.T. canon at the time of Jesus? If so, how was it that the canonicity of several O.T. books was still undetermined at a period so late as the close of the first Christian century? (I refer to the disputes about Esther and Ecclesiastes and one or two others.) How is it that Protestants and Catholics are still not absolutely agreed among themselves to this day as to the contents of the canon and as to the status of the Apocrypha?

There is another very serious question which I venture to put to you. “When the early Protestant dogmatists,” says Dorner, “took their stand upon Scripture alone, they forgot that the corpus of Scrip-

ture, the Canon, was a product of the Church, and that only an infallible interpretation of the Canon could make the infallible book infallibly intelligible." Who, I ask, is your infallible interpreter? Is it possible that there are two popes—one in Rome and one in Shansi?

Your staunch Protestant principles doubtless forbid you to recognize the Scarlet Woman as your spiritual mother, but I think you will find, if you consider the matter, that your position is, in principle, not so far from that of the Roman Church as you suppose. Some remarks by Auguste Sabatier have, it seems to me, a very obvious bearing on cases like yours. "The Catholic," he says, "agrees in advance to accept all that the Church teaches or may teach, whether or not it is in conformity with his moral or religious convictions. There have been, perhaps there still are, Protestants who take this attitude with regard to the Bible, and so far, in method at least, they are still Catholics." Again: "To believe that a doctrine is true because it is in the Bible is something entirely different from saying that it is in the Bible because it is true. In the former case, the external supernatural authority of the Bible alone decides as to truth: in the latter, the Christian reason and conscience are the supreme tribunal. In the first case the Christian vacates his independence of thought; he judges of religious things according to the judgment of others; in the second, he judges of them for himself." Sabatier further points out the "irreconcilable inconsistency" into which every Protestant Church falls "when, owning itself fallible, it seeks to correct its human fallibility by proclaiming as its fundamental dogma the external

infallibility of the biblical canon which it has itself constituted." (*The Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit*, Eng. trans. 1910, pp. 161, 221, 239. Some similar views will be found expressed in Herrmann's *Faith and Morals*, Eng. trans. 1904, pp. 18 f.)

The veteran missionary Dr. Joseph Edkins, in his book on *Religion in China*, tells us how a Chinese controversialist "referred to the difference, as he described it, in moral tone between the Old and New Testaments." The Chinese, complains Edkins, "look at the book as ours, not as His. . . . Nothing in the common course of things can lead an educated pagan to look on the Bible, when he first sees it, as other than a human book. This Chinese said he preferred the New Testament to the Old very much, and threw ridicule on some parts of the Old Testament." Here the critics of to-day are distinctly on the side of Edkins's candid Chinese opponent, not on that of Edkins himself, and this change of attitude towards the Bible has resulted, as we know, in an entirely new theory of inspiration and a doctrine of "progressive revelation" of which Edkins, probably, had never heard, and which would have shocked and perplexed him if it had been brought to his notice.

Edkins's book was published in 1859—the year before the appearance of *Essays and Reviews*—and he was a contemporary of the author of *The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined*. At the very time when his keen-witted Chinese friends were shocking him with their critical attitude towards Old Testament morality and with their unwillingness to



acknowledge the divine authorship of the Bible, an intelligent Zulu was opening the eyes of Bishop Colenso to startling facts which were destined to turn the bishop into the arch-heretic of his day and to throw the Christians of England—or at any rate the country vicars and most of the bishops—into a state of frenzied disorder. Many passages in *Religion in China* suggest the reflexion that if Edkins's mind had been a little less opaque than it was, if he had been less tightly bound by the shackles of tradition and less contemptuous of the questions and criticisms which reached him from members of one of the most intelligent and mentally active races on earth, he might have written a book which would have rendered Colenso's unnecessary, and which would have secured to him, instead of to Colenso, the honour of being offered up as a victim on the altar of obscurantism and religious bigotry.

Edkins lived out his days (he died in 1905) as a thoroughly orthodox and acquiescent defender of what is known in Protestant circles as "the unmutilated Bible"—by which is meant a Bible in which all the forgeries, interpolations, spurious readings, and mis-translations continue to be revered as the inspired Word of God. A few of his broader-minded successors, however, are adopting a much more sympathetic and respectful attitude towards both "heathen" criticisms and "liberal" theology; and some of them have even been known to mention the higher criticism without prefixing the scornful but meaningless epithet "so-called."

"Chinese students," says one missionary writer, "are aware of the modern attitude towards the Scriptures.



They are the product of the human mind, and stand in the same category with the Chinese Classics. The early narratives are mythical, and Christ is an idealized human teacher. Our theological students with a smattering of science are in difficulties over Genesis, and one has a suspicion *that there is a doubt in their minds that we are keeping something back.*" (*Edinburgh Conference Reports*, vol. iv. p. 67.) That this doubt should have arisen in the minds of these Chinese students speaks volumes for their intelligence and perspicacity. Another missionary writes thus: "For a missionary to teach the Bible just as it was taught a hundred years ago is folly, in the light of all that has been learned about the Bible since"; and another (a member of the Society of Friends) says with great candour: "To preach the theory of verbal inspiration and the Bible as a text-book of science is to court disaster sooner or later. There is no need to bind on the Chinese a yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear." (*Ibid.* pp. 67-8.)<sup>1</sup>

In 1907 the Rev. W. K. McKibben, who spent fourteen years as a missionary in China, wrote as follows in a journal published by the Divinity Faculty of the University of Chicago: "If we hold to the conception of the Scriptures as an unerring rule of life and conduct, it is difficult to avoid extenuating or apologizing for the low standards of conduct of many who are held up as models. Deceit, savagery, cruelty, treachery,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bishop Gore, *Orders and Unity*, p. 191: "The old Protestant orthodoxy stood by the sole and final authority of the Bible as the infallible word of God. But it is exactly this position which modern knowledge is making more and more impossible."

lewdness, bulk larger and more prominently in the narrative than we like to think. . . . Use and wont have made our perceptions obtuse at home, else we should not still be giving prizes to children for reading the Bible through. But in the mission-field these things stand out in all their native literalness. *In China at least they stand in painful contrast to the decorum of native writings that originated in the same ancient periods, and they produce questionings always, and undisguised revulsion often.* I recall how an old Christian quietly collected and concealed Scripture portions containing so innocent a narrative as the Book of Ruth after we missionaries had distributed them. It was God's truth, we said, and God would take care of it." He goes on to remark that "the only healthy reaction upon much of the narrative" in the Bible is "disgust, repudiation." I wonder what Edkins would have said if he had lived to hear a brother-missionary talking of the Bible like this! Beside these remarkable admissions I may place an equally illuminating passage from an article published in 1909 by no less responsible a Christian functionary than the Anglican bishop of Tasmania. "There are many who still refuse to allow the existence of moral difficulties in the Old Testament. They bathe them in the glow of religious fervour, or dissolve them in the *aqua fortis* of an unquestioning faith. . . . But must not careful reservations be made before we explicitly maintain that this heterogeneous material, containing elements so crude and contradictory, is fitted for laying the foundations of Christian character? . . . We have plain proof of lack of principle in the fact that the Church of England, impelled by tradition, still orders the reading of passages

which in any other connection would be sternly repressed.”<sup>1</sup>

In view of such frank utterances as these (which, had they been made by agnostics or freethinkers, would have been denounced with indignation as blasphemous calumnies) it is amazing to find that the ardour of the Bibliolaters is by no means damped, their faith in the Bible as a supernatural panacea for the world's misery in no way shaken. There are men and women who still devote their time and energy, and their own and other people's money, to the world-wide dissemination of Bibles and “Scripture portions,” and who annually publish statistics showing the enormous circulation of this literature in every language and in every country. Can we be surprised at the circulation when we remember that wealthy agencies exist for the sole purpose of distributing this book throughout the world at merely nominal prices or for no price at all? Can we be surprised at the statistics so triumphantly flourished by the Bible societies when we remember that in the history of the world's literature there never was a book so prodigiously, lavishly, and persistently advertised as the Bible has been?<sup>2</sup> If this book is in very truth

<sup>1</sup> For some apt remarks on the influence of Old Testament precedents on the theory of persecution, see Walter Hobhouse's *The Church and the World*, p. 383.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the report of the 113th annual meeting of the British and Foreign Bible Society, published in *The Times* of May 3, 1917. One of the Secretaries said “that the Society had helped to produce or circulate the Bible in 504 languages. . . . During the last eleven years, 104 new languages had been added—at the rate of one language in less than every six weeks. More than thirty million copies of the Scriptures had been sent out by the Society during the last three years.” In an advertisement published in *The Spectator* of June 30, 1917, by the same Society, the following remarks occur: “Every week the Society is sending

of such transcendent merit as it is represented to be, if it is indeed unapproachably superior to all other books as a guide to right living and right thinking, if it is manifestly superhuman in thought and utterance, if it is indeed the shrine of "the lively oracles of God," does it not seem a little surprising that there should be any need for the artificial stimulation of its circulation through the medium of advertisement? Surely a book that possesses such overwhelming claims to human admiration and reverence, a book that emanates from the Godhead and contains messages of extreme importance to human welfare, might be counted on to speak for itself and to make its own way among mankind. But what are we to say when we are confronted by the stupefying fact that this sacred volume contains passages and chapters so crude in morality, so objectionable in thought and language, that *Chinese Christians* are ashamed to let them be seen by their "heathen" neighbours? We can easily guess how scathingly Christian missionaries would have criticized such passages if they had found them in the Confucian classics or in the Buddhist sūtras; how is it that they speak in honeyed whispers—if they speak at all—when they find them in the Bible?

Please do not misunderstand me, or assume that I

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out thousands of Testaments, Gospels, and Psalters to military and naval hospitals, wherever the wounded are being nursed. For soldiers and sailors in the great war it has already provided over 6,000,000 of these books in sixty different tongues. To do this entails huge expense. . . . During this present year, 1917, merely to print its editions, the Society must pay £30,000 more than it paid before the war. Will you help in this sacred duty? Send your gift at once to the Secretaries."

have the faintest desire to estimate the Bible at anything less than its true value. Opinions will always differ, no doubt, as to what that true value is. Such differences of opinion are legitimate and unavoidable, so long as men's minds are not all fabricated after one fixed pattern. Deliberately to under-rate the Bible would, in my opinion, be as futile and meaningless as to under-rate the Upanishads, the Lêng-yen Sūtra, the Bhagavadgītā, Plato's Dialogues, the Book of Mencius, Shakespeare's Sonnets, the poetry of Shelley or Alfred Noyes, the *Theologia Germanica*, the "picture-poems" of Wang Wei, or the Plays of Bernard Shaw. I do not regard any of these books or collections of books (not even the last-named) as perfect or infallible; but I have derived great pleasure and profit from them all, as from a multitude of others that I might name, and certainly I have no wish to insist that other people should draw their spiritual and moral sustenance from precisely the same sources that have been spiritually or morally helpful to myself, or that they should accept my classification (if I were foolish enough to make one) of the relative values of different productions of human genius. Perhaps, in view of the endless diversities of human nature, and therefore of human needs, the best plan would be for each one of us to try to create his own Bible by submitting all the literature that comes his way to the test of personal experience, and by the gradual assimilation of all that he finds spiritually or intellectually nutritive. The very attempt to do this would be a spiritual exercise of inestimable value. Many, of course, would prefer to find their Bible not in books at all, but in art or in nature; and no book-lover has the right to assert that he finds richer spiritual

nourishment in his books than others find in pictures or in mountains. In great numbers of the new Bibles conscientiously selected from the best-known literature, I have no doubt whatever that we should find numerous passages, perhaps whole chapters, from the Christian Scriptures; nor have I any desire to see such passages excluded. By all means let us be grateful for every sublime or beautiful or edifying utterance that the Bible contains—and it contains a great many; but let us cease attributing fictitious values to Biblical texts simply because they are Biblical. What is good in the Bible would be equally good if found in any other book; what is worthless or crude should be frankly recognized as such; what is ethically objectionable or revolting to the moral perception should be condemned with no more hesitation than we should condemn it if we found it in the pages of a “pagan” philosopher or a Restoration dramatist. Moreover, it seems to me that every honest student of Biblical or any other literature should utterly eschew the ignoble practice of twisting words out of their natural sense in order to make them conform to some preconceived theory or to a higher moral attitude than that attained by the Biblical authors, and of attempting to prove, by forced exegesis, that black means white or that evil can be reinterpreted to mean good.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> That even the Church is beginning to awaken to the pressing nature of these considerations is shown by the recent decision of the Canterbury Convocation to discontinue the use of the imprecatory Psalms (especially Psalm 58) in public worship. Equally interesting is it to notice how strongly this decision was and is resented by many devout Christians, both lay and clerical. See the letters which appeared in *The Times* during July 1917. A comment of a religious writer in the columns of *The North China Daily News* is worth quoting: “The objection to bowdlerizing the

I strongly recommend you to ponder the words of Jean Réville, who (speaking for Liberal Protestantism) says it is "*not because they are in the Bible* that we meditate upon the exhortations of the prophets or the appeals of Christ," but because those exhortations and appeals are beneficent and beautiful in themselves; whence it follows, he adds, that "*we are quite free to condemn and reject anything which, in this same Bible, shocks our reason or is repugnant to our conscience.*" If you object to Réville's testimony on the ground that he belongs to a nation which (before the war) was spoken of by many Englishmen and some Americans as a nation of infidels or atheists (epithets which, since August 1914, have been transferred to the Germans), perhaps you will listen more patiently to an American who spent many years in China as a missionary. "An officially authoritative pope," he says, "does not more effectually play the usurper over men's minds than does a mechanically authoritative book. Living religion is the presence of God in the heart of man. A mechan-

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ism is that once this sort of thing begins there is no knowing where it will end. What becomes of the Communion Service? What of large parts of the Old Testament? One is reminded of the Biblical critics who begin by questioning the authenticity of a few chapters and end by denying the divinity of Christ." (Cf. the remarks which I have put into the mouths of the China Inland missionaries in the Introduction, p. xvi.) It will be interesting to observe whether those portions of the Psalms and other parts of the Bible which the Christian conscience is at last beginning to be ashamed of are to be deleted from the Bibles which, in their 504 languages, have been placed in the hands of the converted "heathen" and recommended to them as the inspired Word of God and as the source of the material pre-eminence and the alleged moral and spiritual superiority of the Western nations: or whether it will continue to be assumed that the ancient Jewish conceptions of morality and spiritual truth are good enough for the benighted inhabitants of Asia.



cal scriptural authority tends to sap the life of true religion, telling us that the familiar formula, 'thus saith the Lord,' certifies the veritable mandate of God. It saves trouble, indeed, to repose upon authority, either of pope or of book. But the repose is stupefying and tends to forgetfulness of the real presence, the God within." (*The American Journal of Theology*, October 1907, p. 588.) I would remind you, again, that the English "Broad Church" of to-day admits no less readily than candid Frenchmen and candid Americans that our own moral instincts, not the Bible, must be the final court of appeal. Mr. J. E. Symes, late Principal of University College, Nottingham, writes thus at the very outset of his eloquent account of this type of Christian thought. "Suppose," he says, "that the Broad Churchman is considering the doctrine of Everlasting Punishment. If this doctrine appears to him unreasonable, or seems to clash with his moral instincts, he cannot accept it, whatever the Bible and the Church may say or appear to say about it." Nor is this position monopolized by the Broad Church. Dr. Kirsopp Lake, whose clarity of thought and utterance is a quality more often displayed by French than by English theologians, puts the matter in this way: "The theology of the past," he writes, "offered little or no hope for the salvation of an unbaptized person, however good a life he may have led; even the fate of unbaptized infants was regarded as doubtful. At present it is safe to say that no one who maintains such monstrous propositions will even gain a hearing from the general public. Yet that is not because the old view misrepresented the logical results of the traditional theological system, but because the increased sense of abstract



justice puts such teaching out of court, and regards it as the *reductio ad absurdum* of the theory from which it was deduced." (*The Stewardship of Faith*, p. 164.) Even the occupants of Anglican pulpits are now taking courage to say in public some of the things they have long said in private to their friends. The vicar of an important South London parish, asked where he found the seat of authority in religion, answered as follows: "Where Martineau found it—the inner voice. The seat of authority is not wholly in Bible or Church; it must ultimately be in the enlightened consciousness which has to judge the credentials of any claim to authority. That is why Broad Churchmen are not very enthusiastic about foreign missions. We want to spread the light, not merely to make converts. We are less anxious that Mohammedans should become Christians than that they should live up to the best in their own faith." This passage is quoted with disapproval by another Anglican clergyman of a very different school of thought—the Rev. H. E. Fox, and when we learn that Mr. Fox was Honorary Secretary to the Church Missionary Society his disapproval will hardly surprise us. In his little book *Rationalism or the Gospel?* he pleads with much greater zeal than success for the maintenance of the traditional views of Scripture and orthodox Christianity. Mr. Fox's position is one with which you will hardly expect me to sympathize; nevertheless I fully agree with him when he shows that views of the "Liberal" or Broad Church type (which to me are as welcome as to him they are horrifying) must lead to consequences of an extremely serious nature for historic Christianity. "Moses and all the prophets," he says, "were among the credentials to which Jesus

Christ appealed. The emendations of speculative criticism did not appear till eighteen centuries had passed. If this criticism is valid, if modern authority is justified in its readjusted estimate of the Hebrew Scriptures, how could they have been used as they were by Him who declared that both His doctrine and the very language in which it was expressed had been given Him by His Father? If the twentieth century is right, then the first was all wrong. The assured results not merely vitiate the doctrine of the early Church (as some are now urging), but even the teaching of Jesus Christ Himself. The question is not superficial; it is vital." With this view, I repeat, I am in full agreement, though I fear that if writers like Mr. Fox hope to frighten men into a re-acceptance of the old orthodoxy by threatening them with the extinction of Christianity as an institutional religion, they will be grievously disappointed.

## LETTER V

IN a former letter (pp. 14-15) I referred to the French Universalist Guillaume Monod. Believing himself to be the bearer of a new message from the Eternal, his religious teachings were of a constructive rather than a destructive nature, but he often indulged in criticisms of the orthodox Christianity which he believed that his own teachings were destined to supersede. One of his sermons contains an eloquent discourse on the horrors of that grim and unlovely type of Christianity which I have ventured to criticize in these letters. I translate the following extract from the peroration of the French original, which will be found in a very interesting book entitled *Psychologie D'une Religion*, by G. Revault d'Allonnes. M. Monod has been describing the heaven and hell of Protestant orthodoxy, and is trying to show his hearers how morally hideous is the conception of an eternal hell co-existing with an eternal heaven.

“ In the one place (heaven) is Jesus Christ with the few souls that he has been able to rescue from the power of Satan, in the other place (hell) nearly the whole of the great body of sinful mankind, for whom Christ gave his life in vain. And above both heaven and hell stands God, for ever bestowing benedictions on the elect and working vengeance on the lost ; with his right hand heaping benefits on the saved, with his left hand un-

ceasingly raining blows on the damned ; rejoicing both in the perpetual happiness of the few and in the endless despair of the many. Christians, can you really believe in this ? Can you hear such things without trembling ? Ah ! if this horrible heaven could for a moment be realized, Jesus Christ would not enjoy a moment's rest. To those he had redeemed he would speak words like these : O my well-beloved, do you not hear the wailing of my brothers ? Come with me to deliver them ! They are your brethren, your children ; they are bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh. Let us go down to them where they dwell in agony so that we may raise them up to share our happiness—if indeed there can be any happiness at all for us while they are suffering hopeless pain. I will take their sins upon myself, I will bear for them the weight of divine justice, you will preach to them of my love, and God will convert them. Let us leave behind us, in heaven, those theologians who can content themselves with such a heaven as this is now ; for you and me, heaven is not heaven while there exists a hell."

The complacent "theologians" to whom Monod referred in this striking little celestial vignette were of course men like Calvin and his successors (including, I fear, those who share the views of Mr. Frost and the C.I.M.), who saw or professed to see nothing unjust, nothing dishonouring to God, nothing self-contradictory, in the conception of a state or place of everlasting suffering co-existing with a state or place of everlasting bliss. He may also have had in mind theologians like Tertullian, who (in *De Spectaculis*) declared that the contemplation of the agonies of the damned, so far from diminishing the joys of heaven,

would actually be, to the blessed saints, a source of added happiness. Dr. William James, who, as you know, was very far from being an orthodox Christian, remarked that if heaven were offered to the entire human race "on the one simple condition that a certain lost soul on the far-off edge of things should lead a life of lonely torture" it would be a "hideous thing" for mankind to accept such a bargain. I doubt whether a man could be found to-day who would openly disagree with James in principle, however much he might secretly doubt his own ability to reject the bargain if it were offered to him. This shows that the point of view of theologians of Tertullian's stamp is, happily, no longer possible to our own age. Few Christians of our time would dare to say, as Calvin said in his *Institutes*, that it was God's *pleasure* to doom men to destruction, that he saves some and damns others "without any respect to human worth," and that "it is plainly owing to the mere pleasure of God that salvation is spontaneously offered to some, while others have no access to it."

That this view was not peculiar to Calvin I have shown in a former letter (see pp. 29-30). And indeed, if we begin by assuming the truth of the Calvinistic "scheme of Salvation"—and Damnation—it is difficult to avoid Calvin's conclusion that the sufferings of the damned give pleasure—or at least give no displeasure—to the Almighty. Even if we suppose that God is sorry to see his creatures engulfed in the bottomless pit, this sorrow can only be temporary: for if it lasts as long as any of his creatures are suffering pain, then it will last for eternity; because, by hypothesis, hell and its torments are eternal. Is it to be assumed, then, that God is eternally unhappy? No

Christian can be willing to involve his creed in a pessimism so profound as this. Moreover, any such theory would contradict the hypothesis of God's eternal perfection; for it is absurd to predicate perfection of a being who suffers the pain of eternal sorrow. The presence of such pain would of itself constitute a very serious imperfection in the divine personality. Looking at the matter *sub specie aeternitatis*, then, it must be conceded that the sufferings of those in hell cause no unhappiness to God. Unless, therefore, the Christian God is one of the fabled *Di Securi*, and therefore regards mankind with utter indifference, we are obliged to assume that he contemplates their sufferings with feelings analogous to those which in mankind would be called pleasurable.

It is needless to say that there are serious moral difficulties involved in this conception of the Deity. We are told that he is pre-eminently a God of Love, and that his love embraces all creation. Is this merely a flattering hyperbole, invented for the purpose of currying favour with a Deity whose sole preoccupation is the magnifying of his own glory, or is it literally true? If it is true, his love must extend not only to the elect but also to the damned. This being so, why does he not show his love for the damned in a more amiable way than by inflicting everlasting torture upon them? If he wishes to save them but cannot do so, there must be an opposing force stronger than his own, in which case he is not God. According to the statement of one of the most illustrious of saints—Catherine of Genoa—hell would be transformed into heaven if but a single drop of love could fall into it. But as hell is to last for ever, it is clear that the

transformation imagined by St. Catherine will never take place. In other words, although God's love is by hypothesis infinite, he will never allow a single drop of it to reach the wretched creatures whom he has condemned to everlasting perdition: because, if he did so, hell would *ipso facto* turn into heaven. A few Christian theorizers, like John Chrysostom, John Damascene, Prudentius the hymn-writer, and others of less note have suggested that God might, in answer to prayer, grant some mitigation of the sufferings of the lost, at least during certain intervals of "breathing time" (*respiratio*). Even St. Augustine was not opposed to this view, and it has never been condemned by the Church. But if it is true, this theory only serves to bring God's responsibility for the agonies of the damned into stronger relief: for a Deity who could mitigate the sufferings of a lost soul could presumably abolish those sufferings altogether, and would certainly do so if he were literally an omnipotent God of literally boundless love.

Then are we to suppose that God *hates* the damned? All things considered, this seems probable; but in that case hatred must be one of God's attributes, for at least so long as there are damned souls for him to hate. But as it has been ordained that damned souls are to exist, and to suffer, for eternity, God's hate must also be eternal. Now if hate and love co-exist eternally in the divine bosom, it is mere sycophancy for his worshippers to pretend, as they persistently do, that "Love" and "God" are practically synonymous terms. If the C.I.M. is right in contending that all non-Christians are among the damned, it is obvious that the damned—the objects



of God's hate—are vastly more numerous than the saved—the objects of his love. Why then do Christians hail him as a God of Love, and totally ignore the far more conspicuous fact that he is a God of Hate?

And what are we to say about the attitude of the blessed saints and angels who comprise the population of heaven? They, like their God, presumably contemplate the sufferings of the damned without any feeling of uneasiness, and perhaps—as Tertullian and others have announced—with feelings of positive pleasure. It is clear that the sight or knowledge of hell cannot grieve them, for heaven is, by hypothesis, a place or state into which no grief can enter. Moreover, for an angel in heaven to feel or express sorrow or pity for the damned would be perilously near blasphemy or rebellion against God, because it would indicate sympathy with the eternal victims of God's eternal rage or hate, and would imply a belief that God had not treated the lost souls with infinite mercy and love. (On this point I may refer you to Letter III, p. 36.) The saints in heaven are, we are assured, in a state of eternal and perfect bliss, and such a state is incompatible with feelings of sorrow or pity for others. Such emotions would necessarily be accompanied by a desire to remove their cause, otherwise they would not be sincere. This means that the saved would long for the salvation of the damned. But the existence of such longings, which must remain eternally unfulfilled, would necessarily mar the perfection of heavenly bliss. Moreover, if the saints longed for the salvation of the damned they would be guilty of sin, because they would be longing for something of which God disapproved. This would expose the illusory



nature of heaven itself, because it would show the hollowness of the accepted hypothesis that into heaven neither sin nor disharmony can find entrance.

It might be argued that God will conceal from the elect all knowledge of hell, and will even cause them to forget, when they reach heaven, that they had ever heard of the punishments in store for the wicked. Clearly there are grave objections to this theory. We should have to assume, for example, that important parts of the Christianity learned on earth—including some doctrines which, according to Mr. Frost, are “fundamental, necessary, and essential” constituents of the Gospel message (see Letter I, p. 3)—are blotted from the minds of the saved as soon as they reach heaven. We should also have to suppose that they cease to retain the faintest recollection of all those among their friends and relations who had died in the “darkness” of unbelief—otherwise awkward questions would arise as to what had become of them. But why should God go to the trouble of effacing all knowledge of hell from the minds of the saved if hell’s existence is perfectly compatible with divine mercy and infinite love? Is it conceivable that God should be ashamed of his own handiwork? If the damnation of sinners and non-Christians has been ordained by a perfectly righteous and benevolent Deity, why should God take steps to conceal from the knowledge of his saints so brilliant and conspicuous a proof of his loving-kindness?

There remains the theory that God is the author of a divine fraud, whereby he makes hell appear (to the eyes of the saints) to be wholly free from unpleasantness—perhaps even to be, from the celestial

point of view, a kind of replica of heaven itself. Adopting this theory, we must assume that the Almighty, by the exercise of his omnipotent wizardry, causes his holy ones to see justice in injustice, good in evil, pleasure in pain, and truth in falsehood. This means that God, in order to save his own reputation in heaven, lies to his saints by throwing hallucinatory dust in their eyes. This procedure is hardly creditable to the Divine character, even if the dust be composed of jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, and emerald, and the other costly materials that form the constituent parts of the celestial city (see Revelation xxi. 19). And even here we find an irreconcilable contradiction—for are we not told that into that city there shall enter nothing that maketh a lie (*Rev.* xxi. 27 and xxii. 15)? “Whosoever loveth and maketh a lie” is specifically excluded from the heavenly Jerusalem. What, then, becomes of God himself?

From a God who takes pleasure in the eternal torments inflicted by his own decree on vast multitudes of his own creatures, it is but the shortest of steps (if even that be necessary) to the personage known to Christians as the Devil. Hitherto I have said very little about this impressive product of the religious imagination, though he plays so exceedingly prominent a part in the cosmic drama associated with the Christian creed that to ignore him altogether would be nearly as unpardonable as to deprive *Hamlet* of the Prince of Denmark or the Chinese *Lun Yu* of the figure of Confucius. Indeed, a perusal of the missionary literature of the C.I.M. and its allies reveals the fact that the demonology of this type of Christianity

is at least as important, for all practical purposes, as its theology.

I have already drawn your attention to the general unwillingness of the non-Romanist clergy of to-day to be dragged into a discussion about hell (see Letter III, p. 37). I think it may be observed that they are equally unwilling, as a rule, to give any definite opinion about the nature and functions of the Devil. Just as they have awakened to a knowledge of the fact that educated Christian laymen no longer believe in the infernal torture-house which figured so conspicuously in the Christian literature and pulpit dissertations of a bygone day, so they have realized that men are apt to show amused incredulity when they are told about the objective existence of a personal spirit of evil. If it is true, as Dr. Pratt says (see p. 42), that hell has become a kind of joke, it is to be feared that the Devil is in serious danger of degenerating into a mere buffoon, whose inglorious rôle in the future will be to add to the gaiety of nurseries. Nevertheless, it is still too soon to assume that the Devil has been whittled away into an abstraction or a myth. Christian Demonology, eager to prolong the life of her most kingly offspring, has procured for him a valuable ally in the shape of the Muse of Poetry. The Devil has borrowed the garments of Goethe's Mephistopheles and Milton's Satan, and by arraying himself in these gorgeous robes he has succeeded to some extent in disguising his decayed and shrunken form and in maintaining, for the time being, the outward semblance of majestic diabolism. His pretensions to world-rulership are still taken seriously by the extreme right and left wings of the Christian army—the Church of Rome and evangelical Protestantism ;

it is still commonly believed, among missionaries, that over all non-Christian lands his unhallowed sway is almost unchallenged, and that his demon-armies can only be put to flight by the use of the divine talisman which is concealed in the pages of the Bible.

From the Church of England—that favourite home of compromise—no clear statement as to the existence or non-existence of the Devil can be expected. The Anglican clergy of to-day are unlikely to emulate the example of the vicar who (as we know from the once well-known case of *Jenkins v. Cook*) excommunicated one of his parishioners for expressing disbelief in a personal Devil. The result of the legal proceedings in that case was not such as to encourage the Church to incur further risk of ridicule and defeat, even in defence of their cherished Devil. There is ample evidence, however, that as recently as the middle of the nineteenth century Satan was almost if not quite as real a personage to many of the Church of English clergy, and probably to most of their parishioners, as he was to Martin Luther. Luther, you may remember, was once disturbed by mysterious footsteps in the monastic cloister; “but as I knew it was the Devil,” remarked the undaunted Reformer, “I paid no attention to him and went to sleep.” Luther got off lightly; not so the unhappy Romuald of Ravenna, whose sleep was interrupted for nearly five consecutive years, because the Devil used to come and lie on his feet and legs and torment him with a persistence that was truly diabolic.

In 1852 there was published in London a volume of Lectures by Twelve Clergymen of the Church of England. The title of the book was *The Millennial*

*Kingdom*. It is important to note the date of publication, because it was in the decade immediately preceding certain epoch-making events in the worlds of science and theology which were destined to initiate or hasten changes of a momentous character in the real as distinct from the nominal beliefs of British Christians.<sup>1</sup> Those who are inclined to doubt whether any such changes have taken place, and who like to think that Christianity is the same "yesterday, to-day, and forever," might do worse than dip into the pages of *The Millennial Kingdom*, which, if it dissipates their dreams of Christian immutability, may at least, by way of compensation, afford them some innocent amusement.

<sup>1</sup> The following dates may be of interest :—

- 1845. Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* published.
- 1849–1850. The Gorham Case.
- 1850. F. W. Newman's *Phases of Faith* and W. R. Greg's *Creed of Christendom* published.
- 1850. Woman burned alive by French Catholic peasants for witchcraft.
- 1852. Delitzsch's *Genesis* published, showing the composite character of that book.
- 1853. Hupfeld's *Sources of Genesis* published.
- 1855. Two Commentaries on the Pauline Epistles published, one by Dean Stanley, the other by Dr. Jowett.
- 1858. Two papers on Evolution read before the Linnean Society, London : one by Charles Darwin, the other by A. R. Wallace.
- 1858. "Our Lady of Lourdes" showed herself to Bernadette Soubirous.
- 1859. Mansel's Bampton Lectures on the *Limits of Religious Thought* published.
- 1859. *The Origin of Species* published ; also Edkins's *Religion in China*.
- 1860. *Essays and Reviews* published.
- 1861–1879. Colenso's treatises on the Bible published.
- 1862. Judgment given in the *Essays and Reviews* case (see p. 17).
- 1862. Foundation of the *China Inland Mission*.

Unfortunately the book is now rarely seen, for the days of its popularity have long since vanished. As it is probably unknown to you, I will take the liberty of quoting a few sentences from the discourse of the Rev. C. J. Goodhart, whose contribution to the book is entitled "The Removal of the Curse." After setting forth the anticipated joys of the Millennium, Mr. Goodhart proceeds to tell us about the fate of the Devil. "Satan will be shut out," he explains, "both from the earth and the air. If we may judge from some intimations given us in the Word of God concerning that mischievous spirit, called as he is the prince of the power of the air, and working as he evidently did in Job's case in perfect consistency with that character, I am disposed to believe that he may be more instrumental than many imagine in causing the elemental disturbances which afflict our world. Inclined as I feel always to believe *simply* the statements of Scripture, I understand that he inhabits the air with his legions, and roams over the earth in search of mischief and for prey."<sup>1</sup>

It is a pity Mr. Goodhart is no longer with us, for it would be highly interesting to ascertain from him whether airships and aeroplanes do not interfere, to some extent, with the aerial peregrinations of Satan and his lawless crew. Perhaps, however, we are to understand that the men who invented these ingenious contrivances were inspired by the Devil himself, who wished to use them for the furtherance of his own

<sup>1</sup> In his commentary on *Ephesians* vi. 11-12, St. Jerome stated that "this air which divides heaven and is called the void is full of powers adverse to man." This, he adds, was the "opinion of all the learned."

diabolical designs. Events have occurred during the present war, in connexion with flying machines of all types, which would appear to give a certain amount of plausibility to this theory.

To proceed with Mr. Goodhart's discourse: "And however either cholera on the one hand, or atmospheric blight on the other, may be rightly accounted for from natural causes, and both justly traced to the providence of God, yet we may be sure the Devil takes pleasure in the evil effected, and we may feel scarcely less certain that he cheerfully and diligently works in it all, up to the point of the permission given him."

Here we note that the old belief in the diabolic causation of disease has been forced to give way to a more enlightened view; yet, though it is no longer held that cholera and "atmospheric blight" are due to the direct agency of the Devil, we are assured that they give him pleasure, and that he "cheerfully and diligently works" in the evil brought about by such calamities—which, by the way, are "justly traced" to the agency of God himself! The Devil's activities in this direction are, however, subject to certain limitations: he can only work evil "up to the point of the permission given him." Unfortunately, Mr. Goodhart failed to appreciate the grave implications of this theory. If God "permits" the Devil to work evil, it is fair to assume that he could have withheld his permission and thereby prevented the evil. But if God "permits" evil which he could have prevented, he thereby shares the Devil's responsibility, and becomes a partner in his guilt.

Mr. Goodhart's remarks on this subject conclude as follows: "In the day, however, of the coming renewal,



all this will be at an end. Shut up in the bottomless pit, and the earth he laboured to mar becoming thus his prison-house, he will be impotent for evil beyond the walls of his own dungeon; while heaven and earth reflect each other's beauty, and only exchange their influences for mutual blessings."

The fantastic materialism of this conception is startling, and the fact that it is founded on the letter of Scripture does not make it less so. The Devil, one would have supposed, is a spiritual being, and should therefore be able to demonstrate, even more effectually than the English poet Lovelace, that for him stone walls are no prison and iron bars no cage. Yet Cardinal Bellarmine, as late as the seventeenth century, thought it "very probable" that the fire of Purgatory was a real and true fire, and one of his reasons for this opinion was the existence of the active volcano of Etna—a clear intimation of his belief that the sufferings of the dead were to take place in a definite subterranean locality which would eventually become the Devil's prison-house. Dean Inge tells us that the Church of Rome "still teaches not only that the purgatorial fire is material, but that it is situated in the middle of the earth." (*Personal Idealism and Mysticism*, p. 150.) He is candid enough to add, however, that his own Church is in no position to throw stones at the Romanists, for the Church of England, too, is crudely materialistic in some of its imaginings. The fact is that the teachings of modern science, which have been so often anathematized by the Churches for their supposed materialistic tendencies, have actually had the very remarkable effect of abolishing much of the grotesque materialism that disfigured traditional Christianity.

Few Church of England clergymen of to-day are likely to affirm their belief in the personality of the Devil in such distinct and unambiguous terms as those used by Mr. Goodhart seventy years ago. It is true that the Devil is still referred to, from time to time, in the sermons of our modern divines, but the difficulty is to know what such references really mean. In these days of "reinterpretation" it is not sufficient to ask a clergyman what he believes, it is also necessary to undertake the task—often a very wearisome one—of trying to find out what meaning (other than the obvious one) he attaches to the words in which he states his belief. If a parson of three hundred—or one hundred—years ago declared that a certain calamity had been brought about by the Devil, there would be no reason to doubt that he meant precisely what he said. We should know that when he spoke of the Devil he meant a spirit of evil endowed with a distinct personality. But if the Archbishop of Canterbury informs our own generation—as he actually did inform it in August 1914—that the great war was caused by the Devil, we cannot be certain that his meaning has been correctly conveyed by his words. If he were a layman dealing with a "profane" subject, and not a Christian prelate dealing with a religious one, we should assume as a matter of course that his words were to be taken at their face-value. It is quite possible, however, that the archbishop was merely using the conventional phraseology of religion to express the rather platitudinous sentiment that "this war is an evil thing and the result of evil causes." On the other hand it is equally possible that he meant exactly what he said. For all I know to the contrary, the archbishop may believe as firmly in the Devil's

existence as in his own or God's. His words, as reported, were to the effect that this war was "not God's war but the Devil's war." Now if by "the Devil" he merely meant "evil," what did he mean by "God"? It is clear that the terms "God" and "Devil" were used antithetically, and if by the one he did not mean a personal spirit of evil, what reason have we for supposing that by the other he *did* mean a personal spirit of good? If by "God" he meant God, we are justified in assuming that by "the Devil" he meant the Devil. If this assumption is correct, the archbishop is of course exonerated from any suspicion of ambiguity in this particular instance, and we can only regret that his admirable example is not followed more generally by his brother-prelates and the rest of the clergy.

The same problem confronts me when I find a Scottish Episcopalian rector declaring that "the Devil is making his supreme effort for the domination of the world." (This I take from one of the 1916 issues of the monthly magazine of Christ Church, Morningside, Edinburgh.) These words are even more explicit than the archbishop's, and the reference is to the same world-wide calamity; but what does the statement mean? Does "the Devil" stand for the Satan of theology? Does it mean "evil" in the abstract? Or are we to understand that it is a new Christian name for the Kaiser? If the words were *not* intended to express literal fact, would it not have been desirable to avoid the use of a term which old-fashioned Christians doubtless interpreted in its natural sense, and which must therefore have tended to galvanize a dying superstition into renewed vitality?

I have already observed that belief in the Devil is still seriously entertained by the Church of Rome and evangelical Protestantism. Fiercely antagonistic as they are in many theological battle-fields, they are brothers-in-arms in defence of the personality of the arch-enemy of mankind. They are equally unanimous in their testimony to the personal existence of the innumerable demons who help their chief to torture men's bodies and (when "permitted") to ruin their souls. The Catholic teaching on this subject is so well known that I need not dwell upon it. A recent statement of it will be found in chapters x and xi of *The Student's Catholic Doctrine*, published in 1917. From another authoritative volume of recent date I extract the following: "One of the greatest errors of our own time is the common assumption that evil spirits do not exist, or that if they exist they no longer possess or torment men." (*Christ and the Powers of Darkness*, by J. Godfrey Raupert, 1914. Cf. also his book *The Dangers of Modern Spiritualism*, and A. V. Miller's *Sermons on Modern Spiritualism*.)

Equally free from ambiguity is the teaching of that section of Protestantism which is so powerfully represented in the mission-field by the C.I.M. Ample evidence to this effect could easily be produced from the Mission's official publications, but you, as a former member of that Mission, are well aware of its doctrinal position and therefore require no such evidence. The following short passage, however, is perhaps worthy of notice, not because it is unique or in any way unusual, but because it is very typical of the attitude of the C.I.M. towards the whole subject of demonology. In the official organ of the Mission, under date of December

1912, there is an account of a successful proselytizing campaign among some Chinese hill-tribes. Numbers of converts were enrolled, but an epidemic of fever broke out which, we are told, "tried the work badly," and which necessitated a removal of the Christians' meeting-place "from one hamlet to another." To the missionaries it was a "strange" thing that God should test the new converts so severely before they had become "established." This appears to imply a belief that the epidemic was deliberately sent by God as an experimental method of testing the genuineness of the conversions. It does not seem to have occurred to them that by moving the Christian meeting-place from hamlet to hamlet, and thereby attracting crowds away from the infected to the uninfected hamlets, they were probably responsible, to a grave extent, for the spread of the disease. Perhaps they would have said that the converts had nothing to fear from the epidemic, because the Lord would assuredly protect his servants, and that the "heathen"—well, they were only "heathen" and the Devil might look after his own. Unfortunately for this theory, it is clear that the converts enjoyed no immunity from the disease; indeed, it is implied that it was they who suffered the most. The narrative proceeds as follows: "The heathen, of course, say that the demons are punishing these hill-people for giving up the worship of demons. *Certainly, the power of the demons is great among these people.* Praise God, we baptized fifteen believers in this village, one of them a wizard belonging to the place. *His conversion is an outstanding evidence that the Saving Power of the Lord is far above the power of the demons.* During our short tour we baptized sixty-five converts. Hallelujah!"

In this passage we have a very interesting proof of the survival among modern missionaries of the primitive Christian theory that the "heathen gods" are really demons, and that though these demons are very powerful the "Saving Power" of God can overcome them. This being their sincere belief, it is not surprising that Christian missionaries too often show an astounding ignorance of the nature of the religions that stand in the way of their own propaganda, and that their published accounts of such religions are almost invariably full of the wildest misrepresentations and the grossest calumnies.

It is possible that your attention may not have been called to the reports of the annual meeting of the C.I.M. held at Kingsway Hall, London, on May 9, 1916. The following extract is of special interest in connexion with my present subject: "At the evening meeting . . . the chief speaker was the Rev. T. Darlington, of Szechuan, who, after dealing with the theories of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, said that *there Satan was working with indomitable energy for the spiritual and moral undoing of China*, and those who lived in that country were not very long before they *believed in the existence of a personal devil.*" (*North China Daily News*, June 8, 1916.)

Mr. Darlington's words clearly imply a belief that people who were not convinced of the Devil's existence before they reached China would speedily become convinced of it after their arrival there. In other words, Mr. Darlington seems to have assumed that China afforded more abundant evidence of the Devil's personality than could be found in Europe. But was this simply a missionary's way of declaring that in



China there was a great deal of sin and wickedness? If this was all he meant, we may place his utterance side by side with that of Thomas Carlyle, who after conducting Emerson through the East End of London and showing him something of the misery and squalor that existed there, said, "Will you believe in the Devil now, man?" In view, however, of the system of demonology to which the C.I.M. has always remained faithful, it is highly probable that Mr. Darlington intended his remarks to be taken literally and seriously. That being so, there are some questions which, with equal seriousness, I should like—if I had the pleasure of his acquaintance—to put to him. If, as he evidently believes, there is more sin in China than in the West, how does this prove the *personality* of the Devil? If the lesser sins of the West are insufficient to produce conviction of Satan's personal existence, why should the greater sins of China be expected to do so? If non-personal causes, or merely human causes, are sufficient to account for the sins of London, why should a personal or demonic cause be necessary to account for the sins of Canton? Further, on what principle does Mr. Darlington weigh the sins of one people against those of another? What makes him so confident that China is, as a matter of fact, more sinful than the West? Is not his confidence based simply on the *a priori* assumption that a "heathen" land *must* be more sinful than a Christian one, and that Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism must (owing to Satan's patronage of them) be morally and spiritually inferior to Christianity? My own experience of Eastern and Western lands has convinced me (rightly or wrongly) that the people of China are, on the whole, no more



prone to wickedness than those of the West, that neither East nor West has any right to claim moral superiority over the other, and that to abolish Confucianism and Buddhism in favour of Christianity would do grave injury to China. I cannot refrain from adding that if Mr. Darlington wished to gain general acceptance for his theory as to the moral inferiority of China and her religions, he selected a singularly inopportune moment for the purpose. At the time when he delivered his address, the great war, with its hideous and unparalleled accompaniments of vice and crime, had already lasted for nearly two years; and I should have thought that if Mr. Darlington expected to find his personal Devil in that part of the globe which was most conspicuous for its wickedness and sin, it was quite unnecessary for him to carry his explorations beyond the confines of Europe.

Believers in the personal existence of the Devil are convinced, on Scriptural authority, that he is destined to be overthrown by his heavenly rival; but they have never been able to explain, so far as I am aware, how it is that the hopelessness of his position as the antagonist of Omnipotence is apparently unrecognized by himself, in spite of the fact that his final defeat has been made the subject of a divine revelation to man. It is hardly conceivable that if the Devil knew what was in store for him he would continue a struggle which was bound to end in irretrievable disaster for himself: yet how can he fail to be aware of it if it is known to man? Even if he has unaccountably failed, throughout all the past ages of his ill-spent life, to acquire knowledge on a subject of such vital interest to himself, it is inex-

plicable that he should not be in a position to acquire it to-day. Why should he not learn it, for example, from the very pages which I am now writing? Mr Frost, if he saw these letters, would probably declare that they were written under the Devil's inspiration—for are not all things evil attributable to the Devil? Surely, then, the Devil cannot be ignorant of the contents of letters of which he is himself, in a sense, the author; and if he is now overlooking my shoulder as I write (a grave possibility, especially as it is close on midnight) he cannot fail to learn the dreadful truth—which is that all his best-laid schemes, like those of Burns's mouse, must infallibly “gang a-gley,” that all his efforts to strive with God are utterly futile, and that he himself is under sentence of eternal damnation. A reference to pages 77–8 will show him that when the Millennium Kingdom is inaugurated he is to be “shut up in the bottomless pit,” and that the earth which he tried so hard to mar will then become his prison-house. Doubtless the mere fact that his overthrow is prophesied in the Bible would not cause him much alarm, for it may be assumed that if he ever casts a glance at that sacred volume he regards its references to himself as scurrilous slander altogether beneath the notice of a self-respecting Devil, or as the one-sided utterance of a hated rival who, by his own confession, is tainted with jealousy. But if he learns at last from a sincere well-wisher who is one of his own human instruments of guile—and as far as I am concerned he is very welcome to the information—that his heavenly opponent is in the strictest sense of the word omnipotent and therefore absolutely certain of victory, it is scarcely credible that he should be willing to continue a perfectly

hopeless struggle. Satan's power, however vast, is—by the Christian hypothesis—finite, whereas the power of God, also by Christian hypothesis, is infinite. No multiplication of finite quantities can bridge the chasm between the finite and the infinite, and therefore, if Satan is as intelligent as he is usually represented to be, he cannot be ignorant of the obvious fact that even if he were reinforced by a billion demon-allies—each of them a billion times more powerful than Beelzebub or Moloch—his forces would literally be no nearer equality with the forces at the disposal of God than they were on the day when, after his calamitous defeat in heaven, he was

“Hurled headlong flaming from the ethereal sky,  
With hideous ruin and combustion, down  
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell  
In adamant chains and penal fire,  
Who durst defy the Omnipotent to arms.”

It is of course conceivable that Satan is an *unwilling* combatant, and that he is compelled to fight like a gladiator merely for the amusement of the heavenly hierarchy, who, when they tire of the long day's sport, fully intend to turn their celestial thumbs downwards. If, however, Satan is *willingly* maintaining a struggle against an opponent whom he knows to possess resources of power that are literally infinite, he must be either the grandest of heroes or the sorriest of fools : and in neither case can he be regarded as a suitable exponent of undiluted wickedness.

It cannot be denied that there are innumerable Christian legends which represent Satan as being as easily fooled as a guileless child. To devise means of duping him seems to have been a favourite

amusement in medieval Europe. Nor is it only men who have overcome the Devil by trickery: the same unsportsmanlike behaviour is believed by some of the Church Fathers to have been resorted to by God himself. Origen's theory of the Atonement was to the effect that by the Devil's successful temptation of man he acquired rights over the disposal of men's souls. God offered Christ's soul in exchange for the souls of men, and the bargain was accepted; but the Devil was duped, because Christ overcame both him and death. The idea was afterwards expressed in a somewhat graphic way as follows: The bait was Christ's humanity; the Devil snapped at it, and was left hanging on the hook of Christ's divinity. On the whole, however, Christians are not generally disposed to admit that their Arch-Adversary is a fool—on the contrary, they constantly assert that he is possessed of extraordinary intelligence. And surely they are guided by a true instinct; for where would be the glory of evading the clumsy booby-traps of a muddle-headed Devil?

If Satan, then, is no fool, are we to accept the alternative that he is the most heroic figure in the universe? It may be true; but if the Devil is a hero he cannot be wholly wicked, because, being endowed in a superlative degree with the virtue of courage, he is to that extent virtuous. Lord Brougham is said to have been so captured by the courage of Satan in *Paradise Lost* that he was sorry he did not win; and I am not sure that we should not be justified in saying the same of the Satan of orthodox theology. A doubt may even arise in our minds as to whether Satan has not been made the victim of Divine

misrepresentation, and whether the rôles of God and the Devil should not be reversed. Satan, as I have said, cannot be wholly wicked if he strives so heroically in a cause predestined to failure; whereas God is certainly not wholly good if, being omnipotent, he condemns millions of souls—or even *one single soul*—to everlasting pain from which he can but will not grant release. Moreover, we have no reason to suppose that Satan would ever have thought of creating a hell, or would have done so if he had thought of it; whereas God, we are told, both thought of it and did it.

But there is another possible explanation of Satan's heroic persistence. What if he maintains the struggle because, with better knowledge than man possesses, he is aware that the contest is *not* a hopeless one? What if God's omnipotence turned out to be a fable after all—merely a baseless story circulated among mankind to discourage rebellion and keep them in a state of reverential awe? What if Satan were to assail heaven once more with his legions of fallen angels (as we are told in the Second Book of *Paradise Lost* he thought of doing) and succeed, this time, in dethroning its Divine despot? We may be sure that in one respect, at least, he would make good use of his power: he would open the gates of hell—certainly to release his fellow-sufferers, and possibly (who knows?) *to admit his vanquished foe*.

## LETTER VI

AT the beginning of my first letter (p. 1) I referred to the difficulty, in these days of "restatement" and "reinterpretation," of obtaining an authoritative definition of what Christianity really is. There is an ever-growing number of people who call themselves Christians, and even cling to the phraseology of the creeds, and yet are sceptics or infidels with regard to many of the doctrines which have been regarded by all the great historic Churches as absolutely essential to the faith of a true Christian—doctrines so essential that in the days when the Churches were backed by the whole strength of the State, the persons who doubted or denied them were liable to the ghastly punishments reserved for heretics and apostates. In these days of dwindling faith the expression of disbelief in even the fundamentals of Christianity is no longer a criminal offence; but it is a very doubtful question whether the "Liberal" Protestants, Broad Churchmen, and Modernists of to-day, having surrendered many of the essential tenets of historic Christianity, are justified in applying the Christian name to the beliefs which they find it possible to retain.

It cannot be denied that many of these neo-Christians, by forcing new meanings into the old verbal formulæ, have gone far to reject the religion of their

forefathers. By retaining the form while they reject or transform the content of the old creed, they seem to think they have preserved all that is essential—as though the Christian faith were merely a heap of verbal counters to which they, the players, are entitled to attach any meanings that happen to suit their game!

Among the “reinterpreted” doctrines are those of the Fall and Redemption of man, the Atonement and the Resurrection of the Body. In respect of these dogmas the newer views (*e. g.* Atonement = at-one-ment) have practically won the day, even among people who pride themselves on their orthodoxy. The changes have come about so gradually that most people are hardly aware that there has been any change at all. Modern ideas about the Incarnation, however, have not yet quite succeeded in supplanting the orthodox theory, and existing divergences as to the meaning of this central dogma are sufficient to justify grave doubts as to whether the term “Christianity” can legitimately be stretched so far as to include those who disbelieve (for this is what it comes to) in the Godhead of Jesus. Keble certainly gave a satisfactory proof of his orthodoxy when he declared with emphasis that “this Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Mary, is indeed the Most High God, Creator and Possessor of Heaven and Earth and of all things visible and invisible”; but with this clear and unambiguous statement of Catholic doctrine in our minds, what are we to say about the terms in which a younger theologian—a contemporary of our own—prefers to express the same central tenet of the Christian religion? “If we are to form a right conception of God,” says the Rev. William Temple in *Foundations*, “we must look at Christ. The wise



question is not, 'Is Christ Divine?' but, 'What is God like?' and the answer to that is 'Christ.' " To pretend that in these statements Keble and Temple have merely used different phraseology to express identically the same truth is, to say the least, disingenuous.

In 1583 one John Lewes, "an obstinate heretic," was burned alive at Norwich for "denying the Godhead of Christ." It is fortunate, not only for lay heretics, but also for many of our "clerks in holy orders" to-day, that they were born in the nineteenth, not in the sixteenth, century. There are scholars among them who "restate" far more drastically than Temple. For example, Dr. D. C. Macintosh of the Yale Divinity School, while not going so far as to agree with the Drews school in its denial of the historicity of Jesus, has nevertheless arrived at the conclusion that a belief in his existence is not essential to Christianity! And there are members of the English clergy who have expressed the same opinion.

I purposely refrain from enlarging upon the views of German critics, because the present aim of the defenders of the established creeds in the allied countries (especially England) is, as you have doubtless observed, to establish a direct causal relationship between the higher criticism as manipulated by wicked German professors and the atrocities committed during the war by the German army and navy. But it is, of course, an absurd mistake to suppose that the neo-Christians of to-day are to be found only in Germany. They are confined to no single country, and are certainly to be met with in America and England as well as in France, Holland, and Italy. The ordinary lay public in those countries (especially the two first

named) are not yet very familiar with the advanced views referred to, because for the most part they are put forward in expensive theological works and in "heavy" reviews which are seldom read by the average layman; moreover, they are expressed in language which is deliberately couched, as far as circumstances permit, in the verbal formulas of Christian tradition, and therefore appear, on a superficial reading, to be more orthodox than they really are. Yet even the layman, if he is exceptionally wide-awake and intelligent, is beginning to enquire into the meaning *for him* of the unparalleled unrest which he cannot help seeing around him in all the Churches. He finds the ablest writers and thinkers in Christendom insisting on the gravity of the crisis with which the Church is now faced, and on "the urgent necessity for a restatement of Christian doctrines and a revision of Christian methods." (The Bishop of Hereford, in his farewell sermon at St. Margaret's, Westminster, as reported in *The Times* of December 9, 1912.) He will find distinguished preachers admitting, in sermons preached before mixed congregations, that the very creeds (to quote the bishop again) are "partially obsolete" and "cannot be rightly or reasonably clothed with a precise and final authority." The enquiring Christian of to-day is assured, on the one hand, that in the Apostles' Creed is to be found "the common basis of Christian thought" (the Rev. A. E. Burn, D.D.); yet he will be told, on the other hand, that "our beliefs concerning 'God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth' are radically different from the beliefs of our fathers," and that "the only words in that sentence of the Apostles' Creed which we can interpret as our ancestors

did are the words 'the,' 'of,' and 'and.'" (Henry Goodwin Smith, D.D., formerly professor of Systematic Theology.) Dogmas have been discarded one by one, and are being or have been replaced by substitutes which the Christian public are encouraged to think are the same old dogmas because they are dressed up in the same old names. Heresies (some of them anathematized by Popes and Church Councils centuries ago) are rampant in all the Churches, and doctrines which to the scandal and horror of Christendom were daringly attacked by the "infidels" and "atheists" of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are now lightly surrendered, reinterpreted, or declared "unessential" by men who are the professional exponents of Christian thought and the official defenders of the Christian "deposit of faith." To-day the warfare is not only between "infidel" and Christian but also between Christian and Christian, and the conflict is being fought out at the very threshold of the holiest sanctuaries of the faith. "Difficulties," said Father Tyrrell, "have accumulated to a degree that makes the ablest and most cultivated minds to be those least capable of effecting a reconciliation between orthodox theology and the rest of the field of knowledge." (*A Much-abused Letter*, p. 40.) Those "ablest and most cultivated minds" are now engaged in vain efforts to construct a new Christian edifice on the foundations of the old one without pulling the old one down to make room for the new. An English bishop asserts that orthodox Protestant Christianity "has received a series of intellectual shocks, the seriousness of which it is impossible to exaggerate," and that certain time-honoured doctrines have been "riddled by the shot and shell of criticism." (Bishop

Gore, in *Orders and Unity*.) A well-known English clerical writer of unblemished orthodoxy sorrowfully admits that the Western world of to-day is no more Christian than it was in the days preceding the reign of Constantine, and that "the atmosphere in literature and art, in novels and dramas, in newspapers and reviews, is not only no longer Christian, but is largely anti-Christian, even on the ethical side." (Dr. J. N. Figgis, *Civilisation at the Cross-roads*, pp. 29-31.)

A Scottish minister (the Rev. D. Macmillan, in *Facing the Facts*, p. 243) declares that even God-fearing Scotland is calling for "a restatement of Christian doctrine" on the ground that "the old doctrinal position has been undermined" and that nothing as yet has been found to put in its place. A few months before the outbreak of war *The Record* (a Church of England weekly) referred to "the lamentable fact" that the criticism now predominant not only in the German but also in the English Universities "maintains views respecting the Old Testament, and even in some cases respecting the New, which are totally inconsistent not merely with their accuracy in detail, but with their substantial truth." Cambridge possesses an active Society of Heretics, the *fons et origo* of a series of papers which, had they appeared a few generations ago, would have added a ruddier glow to the fires of Smithfield. Both Oxford and Cambridge harbour tutors, lecturers, and professors whose disbelief in the Christian Creeds is a matter of common knowledge, yet these men retain their academic positions as guides and teachers of the rising generation without a word of serious protest either from the University authorities or from parents and

guardians. When, about four years ago, some stir was caused by the prosecution of an uncultured rationalist under one of the obsolescent blasphemy laws, it was a very distinguished English professor, a man of letters of European reputation, who wrote to the Press and suggested that if the authorities wished to renew the vitality of those laws they should begin by prosecuting several members of the professorial and tutorial staffs of the two Universities (including himself) and at least two highly respectable members of His Majesty's Government.

The ranks of the clergy contain men who explicitly or implicitly avow their disbelief in the "nature-miracles" of both Testaments, and also in the dogmas of the Virgin Birth of Jesus and his bodily Resurrection and Ascension; and candidates for Anglican ordination not long ago were so obstinate in their refusal to make a solemn declaration of their belief in the truth of the Old and New Testaments that it became necessary to modify the wording of the formula. Biblical scholars of high reputation have admitted that it is impossible to write a biography of Jesus, because there are no trustworthy materials out of which such a biography can be constructed. This is allowed even by so reverent and conservative a critic as Professor A. S. Peake. According to the late Professor Cheyne of Oxford, "it is abundantly established by criticism that most of what is contained even in the Synoptic Gospels is liable to the utmost doubt," and that "what may reasonably be accepted is by no means capable of use as the basis of a doctrine of Incarnation." He also refers to the "considerable probability" that the Crucifixion is unhistorical. (*The*

*Reconciliation of Races and Religions*, 1914, pp. 201-2, 185.) We also know that this critic inclined to the belief that the Twelve Apostles never existed, and that Jesus was not betrayed by Judas or by anyone else. And yet Dr. Cheyne succeeded in persuading himself that he was not only a Christian but an Anglican!

Perhaps even more shocking to orthodox sensibilities than the views of this Oxford professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture are those of the great French modernist, the ex-abbé Loisy. This scholar has suggested that after the Crucifixion (the historicity of which he sees no sufficient reason to doubt) the body of Jesus was thrown into a common malefactors' trench, and that if it had been looked for a few days later it would have been unrecognizable.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear, then, that those orthodox writers (lay and clerical) who ever since the outbreak of war have been trying to make out that the iniquities of Germany are traceable to the prevalence in that country of what they love to describe as "the vagaries of the so-called 'higher criticism,'" would do well to disabuse themselves of the idea that similar "vagaries" are rarely met with in England, America, and France. It was in 1914—shortly before war was declared—that the Bishop of London, at a meeting of the Upper House of Convocation, presented a

<sup>1</sup> "On peut supposer que les soldats détachèrent le corps de la croix avant le soir et le mirent dans quelque fosse commune, où l'on jetait pêle-mêle les restes des suppliciés. Les conditions de sépulture furent telles qu'au bout de quelques jours il aurait été impossible de reconnaître la dépouille du Sauveur, quand même on l'aurait cherchée." (Loisy, *Les Évangiles Synoptiques*, p. 223.)

petition signed by 676 priests of his diocese "expressing grave anxiety at the unchecked denial of fundamental truths of the Faith by some who hold office in the Church." At the annual meeting of the Catholic Union held on June 26, 1914, Cardinal Gasquet delivered a lecture on the spread of Liberalism in religion in both France and England. He pointed out that the tendency of non-Catholics appeared to be "towards absolute vagueness and uncertainty on the part of those who continue to believe anything at all of the truths of Christianity. Here in England the most fundamental doctrines of the Incarnation of our Lord are rejected or explained away, even by those who continue to claim membership in a Church which professes itself to be Christian." He added that "if we look to France we find a State which, as a State, has cut itself off from the profession of any form of religious belief, and has even excised the name of God from the approved books intended for the instruction of the young." (See *The Times*, June 27, 1914.)

The fact that the keenest critics of the orthodox Christianity of the Churches are themselves Christians, or like to call themselves so, is precisely what imparts a special significance and piquancy to the present situation. It would, of course, be easy to find most of the heresies of our contemporary Modernists and Broad Churchmen in the works of numerous writers who do *not* lay claim to the Christian name; but I purposely avoid all reference to such writers, because orthodox Christians have a well-known habit of disposing of their non-Christian opponents by declaring that they are prejudiced against Christianity and



therefore cannot be admitted as witnesses; or that they are sciolists, with no expert knowledge of Christian theology or Church history; or that they confuse the accidents of Christianity with the essentials; or that they lack the Christian "experience" which could alone justify them in disputing the utterances of those to whom such "experience" is familiar; or that they are men of evil lives and infamous character who profess disbelief in Christian dogmas because they wish to find some logical excuse for their abandonment of Christian morals. These simple methods of crushing "infidelity" and heresy cannot be successfully adopted by the upholders of traditional Christianity when their opponents are not only men of irreproachable character, but are also trained theologians who insist, legitimately or otherwise, on their right to call themselves Christians. These daring innovators are the friends, not the enemies, of Christianity (or, at least, of what they believe Christianity to be capable of becoming), and their criticisms of orthodoxy or credal restatements are therefore entitled to be treated with a respect which perhaps we can hardly expect the Church to pay to the criticisms of confessed enemies. "There is nothing wanton about them," as Dr. Sanday says, "nothing supercilious, nothing cynical; they obey their conscience and go where their conscience leads them; they are evidently, all of them, genuinely religious men and good Christians." (*A Reply to the Bishop of Oxford's Open Letter on the Basis of Anglican Fellowship*, 1914, p. 29.) Even Bishop Gore is obliged to admit (see the *Oxford Diocesan Magazine* for June 1914) that "we have not to do with men who have any tendency to hypocrisy or personal insincerity."

Another thing that tends to embarrass the orthodox in their attempts to withstand the assaults of their "advanced" fellow-theologians is their disquieting knowledge of the fact that the heterodoxy of one age has often become the orthodoxy of another, and that men whose opinions seem dangerously heretical to-day may be regarded as the conservatives of a not distant future. Hence we find an increasing reluctance to initiate prosecutions for heresy. One generation is shocked by *Essays and Reviews* (1860), or, through its representative Lord Shaftesbury, declares *Ecce Homo* (1865) to have been "vomited from the jaws of hell." The next generation sees nothing very dreadful in either *Essays and Reviews* or *Ecce Homo*, but is alarmed by *Lux Mundi* (1889), the disintegrating effects of which caused an orthodox wit to give it the alternative title of *Flux Mundi*. Those whose spiritual eyesight was not blasted by *Lux Mundi* winced with pain at some of the pages of *Contentio Veritatis* (1902). Many of those who survived all these shocks without spiritual or moral collapse are now scandalized by *Foundations* (1912) and horrified by the Rev. J. M. Thompson's *Miracles in the New Testament* (1911) and *Through Facts to Faith* (1912). And I think we may confidently prophesy that when the writers of *Foundations* are a score of years older, more than one of them will be found among the active opponents of some new school of religious thought that shows a disposition to climb still higher—or (would you prefer me to say ?) to descend still lower. One, at least, of the contributors to *Foundations* seems to anticipate that at some future date he and his colleagues may be looked upon as conservative old fogies. "Will not a future genera-

tion," he asks, "look on a position such as ours as we look on the 'harmonies' of Genesis and Science which abounded in the magazines of the 'seventies' and 'eighties'?" I fear the answer to that question can only be (to use political phraseology) in the affirmative.

The Church has always had critics and restless innovators within her own borders, but till recent years it was usually possible to find some effectual means of silencing them. The Church of Rome expels the Modernists from her communion, but she is no longer able to strike at the root of the evil, for the simple reason that she no longer dares to use physical force. Against the abbé Loisy she launches the major excommunication. In other days this would have compelled him to choose between recantation and death: in this twentieth century the only material calamity that befalls M. Loisy as a result of his excommunication is that he loses the services of his pious charwoman.

But if the Churches of Christendom and the maintainers of the various Christian orthodoxies can no longer exterminate heresy by means of thumb-screw and stake, and cannot, in the circumstances, accuse the heretics to whom I have referred of being antagonistic to religion, they stand on strong ground when they declare that men who deny some of the fundamental tenets of traditional Christianity should cease to exercise priestly and ministerial functions in the Church. This is the attitude of men like Professor Benjamin B. Warfield of Princeton, the Bishops of Oxford and Zanzibar, the Dean of Canterbury, and the 676 priests of the Diocese of London who signed the above-mentioned petition to Convocation. It cannot be denied that

their case is a very strong and reasonable one. What they say, in effect, is that when a clergyman finds he has ceased to believe in the Church's creeds and has moved away from the doctrinal position which at his ordination he promised to defend, his plain duty is to retire from his official position as one of the Church's licensed ministers. Dr. Wace, for example, puts the case in a nutshell when he says that when ordained clergymen are led by criticism "into conclusions which are inconsistent with that unfeigned belief in the truth of the Scriptures which our Church professes, and which . . . the Church has held from the time of our Lord, their place is not in the ministry." (*The Record*, November 14, 1913.) Sometimes the opinion is expressed that men who retain their official positions in the Church while they disbelieve in the Church's doctrines, or in the Church's interpretation of those doctrines, are guilty of conduct which is likely to mislead or to deceive. Lord Hugh Cecil states this point of view in the following words: "It is a plain question for plain people. And I think plain people will decide that a minister of the Church of England who definitely rejects the Apostles' Creed or certain clauses of it, and yet retains his benefice, is not acting the part of a man of honour." (*The Times*, April 23, 1914.)

The suggestion that modernist and liberalizing theologians are not men of honour is, in my opinion, a cruel slander. Most of these men, if not all, continue to call themselves Christians and retain their offices in the Church not from any selfish or hypocritical motive but from a chivalrous and disinterested desire to relieve Christianity of its incrustation of puerile superstition and pseudo-metaphysics, and start it on a

new career of spiritual and moral usefulness; and because they sincerely believe that without some such restatement or reinterpretation as they have attempted Christianity is doomed to extinction. Nevertheless, I am in entire agreement with the writers last quoted in thinking that persons who hold extreme Modernist or Liberal views should give up their official positions in a Church that exists for the express purpose of teaching, maintaining, and promulgating creeds and dogmas in which they have ceased to believe. Indeed, I would go much further, and say that in my opinion such men *should cease to call themselves Christians*. It is surely far from right that men should apply to new religious syntheses of their own a term which for many centuries has been intimately and exclusively associated with beliefs and tenets which they largely or wholly repudiate. The retention of the Christian name by men whose beliefs or opinions are completely subversive of Christian orthodoxy must necessarily tend to sophistication and misunderstanding, and cannot serve the highest interests of either morality or religion.

Doubtless "the soul that is alive and wants to live and grow must," as Tyrrell says, "have a congenial, intelligible idea of the world it would live in, and will therefore either adapt and interpret the current theologies to suit its requirements or else break away from them altogether and make a home for itself" (*Through Scylla and Charybdis*, p. 219); but it is the second alternative, I think, which should be adopted by those who deny the truth of the "current theologies" as authoritatively interpreted, or who have serious doubts as to the truth of doctrines which have been declared by the official exponents of the creeds to be essential to Christianity.

I do not for a moment deny that it is perfectly possible to attribute new meanings to old dogmas. There is no special difficulty in restating Christianity "in terms of modern thought," as the saying goes, for the simple reason that all language is conventional and can be made to mean anything whatever. Man is lord not only of the Sabbath but also of the words which stand as arbitrary symbols of his ideas. A Catholic bishop, it is said, once addressed a haunch of venison with the words "I baptize thee carp." The reason for the selection of the name of a fish in this case was, of course, an eminently practical one—the day was Friday and the bishop was hungry. Now had it been the Church's rule that on Fridays good Catholics must abstain from both flesh and fish, but were at liberty to derive what nourishment they could from a diet of flowers, the bishop might just as readily have conferred upon that haunch of venison the baptismal name of "yellow primrose" or "flower in the crannied wall." Any statement whatever can be shown to be true, or plausible, if unqualified freedom of interpretation is allowed. If I declared that a cow jumped over the moon you may refuse to believe me, and perhaps you will accuse me of trifling with you, as Hamlet trifled with Polonius when they discussed the shape of a cloud. But what if I assure you that my statement is perfectly true, and that I am prepared to prove it so conclusively that you will be compelled to agree with me? The only preliminary stipulation I have to make is that you will give me full liberty to put my own interpretation on the words *moon*, *over*, *jumped*, and *cow*. I do not insist on imposing any novel interpretation upon the remaining word "the."



When we contemplate some of the attempts that have been made in recent years to restate Christian doctrine, we feel impelled to ask why it is considered necessary to "restate" or "reinterpret" at all. If the conceptions underlying the old formulas are obsolete, what is the use of retaining the formulas while rejecting the conceptions which alone gave them life? Many of our modern prophets of Christian "reinterpretation" bear a significant resemblance to the Neoplatonists, who, as Jowett said in his introduction to the *Timaeus*, "had a method of interpretation which could elicit any meaning out of any words." We know that Anaximander's philosophy was an attempt to "restate" the current Greek religion in terms that were agreeable to the thought and knowledge of his own educated contemporaries, but what was the result? It is precisely the "restated" part of his philosophy, the part that re-embodied the obsolescent religious conceptions of his time, that is grotesque and impossible to us.<sup>1</sup> We also know that Dyānand Sarasvatī, the founder of the Ārya Samāj, "reinterpreted" the Vedas in such a way as to adapt them to a more refined spirituality than that which formed their original environment. By a violent exegesis he also strove to show that the sacred pages contained, at least in germ, all the scientific and other knowledge that has been acquired by man in the course of the ages subsequent to the Vedic "revelation." The result is satisfactory only to those who are willing to

<sup>1</sup> Cf. what Mr. C. C. J. Webb calls "the *damnosa hereditas* of a belief in the supernatural dignity of the heavenly bodies bequeathed by Plato and Aristotle to the Schoolmen issuing in fatal consequences to the Christian tradition with which the Schoolmen had attempted to combine it." (*Studies in the History of Natural Theology*, p. 313.)



subordinate all other considerations to the dogma of the divine inspiration of the Vedas.

One of the ablest of the younger Anglican Modernists of our time says "there is an obvious advantage in keeping old names, even when we give them new meanings. It is a recognition of the real continuity of thought underlying successive changes of interpretation. Forms are the last things to change, not the first. And it is a good way in which to recommend new ideas to people who would be unwilling to receive them in less familiar shape." (J. M. Thompson, *Through Facts to Faith*, p. 46.) This is plausible enough, but the method is often a cloak for much ambiguity and apparent (not necessarily real) insincerity. It also enables Christian apologists to claim apparent victories over the assailants of doctrinal Christianity when as a matter of fact those assailants have already attained (as they say at the Western battle-front) all their objectives. Further, the employment of this method makes it extremely difficult to ascertain what the Modernist's beliefs really are. (I have said a few words on this subject on pp. 60 and 79-80.) One of the most respected Anglican divines of our time (I am not quite sure whether he would accept the designation "Modernist" as applicable to himself) affirms his "entire and strong belief in the central reality of the Supernatural Birth and the Supernatural Resurrection" [of Christ]. (Dr. Sanday's pamphlet on *Bishop Gore's Challenge to Criticism*, p. 28.) Now who would understand from this that Dr. Sanday (if I understand him aright) *rejects* the dogma of the Virgin Birth and *rejects* the dogma of the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus from the grave? While discarding the materialistic (but orthodox) doctrine of the carnal resurrection,

Dr. Sanday tries to justify his faith in the Resurrection-dogma by signifying his acceptance of the evidence for the theory that "the Risen Lord as Spirit still governed and inspired his Church." Now this last statement is one which probably no agnostic or non-Christian would think it worth while to dispute. It may mean anything or nothing. It may mean only what we should mean if we declared that the spirit of Nelson still governed and inspired the British Navy. This remark might well be said to contain a certain amount of truth which could be verified from experience and history, yet it does not necessarily imply a belief that Nelson, if he survived at all, was in a position to know anything whatever about the doings of the Navy after his death or continued to take the smallest interest in its victories.

Sir Oliver Lodge remarks that "it is not difficult to interpret the legend of 'Adam,'" and after giving us his own interpretation of that legend he says, "the whole parable is very consistent with evolutionary science." (*Reason and Belief*, pp. 120-121.) 'This is nowadays a favourite form of apologetic, but it is simply beating the air. I suppose no "infidel," no rationalist, was ever foolish enough to deny that the Adam legend or any other Biblical story was susceptible of a mythical interpretation by which it could be brought into line with modern science or harmonized with a refined ethic. I wonder if Sir Oliver Lodge could name a single story preserved in any of the sacred books of the whole world that could not be forced into conformity with scientific truth or an up-to-date morality by being treated as a parable or myth and "interpreted" with a moderate amount of ingenuity and skill. We know that the fables about the gods of Olympus were so treated by

the educated "pagans" of antiquity, and we know that the loves of Krishna have been given a spiritual interpretation by modern Hindu reformers. But though it is undoubtedly true that even the most indecent or most puerile of the narratives and legends contained in the various sacred documents of the world's religions can be made to glow in the chaste light of a benign interpretation, it is extremely questionable whether it is morally justifiable to adopt this method of prolonging the lives of obsolete creeds and thereby maintaining popular belief in the divine authorship of the primitive ethical codes and the crude cosmologies of our remote forefathers.

The resolutions which were proposed by the Bishop of London in the Upper House of Canterbury Convocation in 1914, and carried by a large majority, asserted that the three Creeds were "the necessary basis of the teaching of the Church," and that "the historical facts stated" in those Creeds were "an essential part of the Faith." (*The Times*, May 1, 1914.) Now for my own part I concur with those who hold that persons who do not believe in the alleged "historical facts" here referred to must be regarded as having rejected "an essential part of the Faith" and should renounce the vain attempt to persuade themselves or others that they are still Christians.

Sir Edward Clarke, president of the National Church League, forwarded to the two Anglican archbishops, in 1914, a petition bearing 96,153 signatures. After asserting the supremacy of "Holy Scripture," the petitioners argued "that the statements of the Creeds commonly called the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy

Scripture, and that *it is incumbent upon every member of our Church to believe* that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, born of a pure virgin, made upon the Cross (by His own oblation of Himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; and did truly rise again from the dead." I am in entire agreement with the ninety-six thousand persons who signed this petition that people who feel unable to accept these statements of alleged fact in their natural and obvious sense are not strictly entitled to call themselves members of the Church of England or of any Christian Church that regards them as essential truths of the Faith.

I have already remarked that it is becoming increasingly difficult to know what a member of the clergy really means when he declares his "belief" in a Christian doctrine. Can we be surprised at this when we learn on clerical authority that "the Thirty-nine Articles have been quite honestly interpreted in almost 339 different ways"? (*Byways of Belief*, by the Rev. Conrad Noel, p. 240.) Surely this is a sufficiently adequate illustration of the fact, to which I have already drawn attention, that human language, if not always and necessarily an imperfect vehicle of human thought, is nevertheless capable of an endless variety of interpretations. The case of the Thirty-nine Articles must be regarded as a specially striking one when we remember what infinite pains were taken to make their meaning as plain and unambiguous as possible, and how it was expressly stated, in the declaration that accompanied them, that each Article

was to be taken in its "literal and grammatical sense."

As an example of the class of doctrine that, without being definitely surrendered, is nowadays frequently "reinterpreted" in such a way that its original and traditional meaning is entirely annulled, let us take the dogma of the Virgin Birth. Hooker said long ago that this dogma is "a thing which of necessity we must believe." Now Hooker lived before the days of Modernist or Broad Church reinterpretation, and we may be quite sure that when he said "virgin birth" he *meant* virgin birth. In citing the case of Dr. Sanday I have already shown that we cannot speak with the same assurance of some of our modern theologians. Fortunately, however, we may still find, even in the Anglican priesthood, an occasional writer or preacher who really says what he means, and whose words are as free from ambiguity as words can be. One of these is the Rev. N. P. Williams, chaplain-fellow of Exeter College, Oxford. He refers to the Virgin Birth as being one of "the three crucial miracles," the two others being the Resurrection and the Ascension. These three wonders, he says, "are rooted in the very tissue of historic Christianity, as I conceive it; they are bone of its bone, and flesh of its flesh: the full credit of the 'infallibility of the Church' has been irretrievably hypothecated on their truth." (*Form and Content in the Christian Tradition*, p. 144.) He goes on to say that he rejects the "mythological explanation" of these wonders, and accepts them as literally true in that material sense which carries with it the sanction of the Church. In the following courageous and lucid

words he makes it clear beyond the possibility of doubt that "virgin birth" means to him exactly what it meant to Hooker. "I trust," he says, "that I am not insensible to the effect of genuine *a posteriori* evidence: and if at any future time an ostrakon or a papyrus leaf is unearthed at Nazareth which proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that *Jesus was the son of Joseph, I shall frankly admit that Catholic Christianity has tumbled down with a crash*, and I shall proceed to look round for some other theory of the universe. But I have a shrewd suspicion that no such ostrakon or papyrus will ever emerge." (*Ibid.* p. 90.) Similarly he says (on p. 120) that if it were proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that Jesus was not born of a virgin, he would "at once and without hesitation abandon, not merely the belief in the Virgin Birth, but all the rest of Catholic Christianity as well."

In one respect, indeed, Mr. Williams's challenge is not quite fair. If, as a matter of historical fact, Jesus had a human father, it is practically inconceivable that any convincing proof of this could be furnished. Even if the ostrakon or papyrus imagined by Mr. Williams were actually discovered, the Church would merely defy the world to prove that the statements contained in it were true; and obviously no such proof could be forthcoming. What those of us who stand outside Christianity feel about the question is that the burden of proof that Jesus was born of a virgin rests with the Church, and that the evidence hitherto furnished in support of this article of the Christian creed is ludicrously inadequate. It is easy for Mr. Williams to challenge unbelievers to disprove the virgin birth, because he knows that the circumstances attending



human procreation and birth are such that disproof of virginal birth in any alleged instance is a practical impossibility, especially when the parties concerned have been dead for many centuries. If I chose to assert that Homer, or Buddha, or the next-door neighbour of Shakespeare's great-grandmother, was born of a virgin, I fancy that Mr. Williams would find it as difficult to confute me as it would be for me to satisfy him that Jesus had a human father. All this, however, does not affect the value of Mr. Williams's unambiguous testimony to his honest belief in the *literal truth* of the Church's doctrine with regard to the parentage of Jesus.

Would that every clergyman could be induced to state his beliefs in language equally unmistakable! Yet Mr. Williams is not alone, for we find similar lucidity and definiteness in the statements made by the Rev. R. A. Knox. Mr. Knox is another Oxford scholar, who, on account of his thoroughly uncompromising orthodoxy, is regarded by many of his own party as a somewhat disconcerting if not dangerous champion of their cause, but he has nevertheless written a very entertaining book about the "Loose Stones" which he has discovered in the "Foundations" of neo-Christianity. Now when Mr. Knox states his belief in the dogma of the Ascension, it is evident from his language that he really holds the doctrine which the Church enjoins upon all Christians—namely, that the resuscitated physical body of the risen Jesus was actually removed from the surface of the earth and disappeared from the view of the wondering disciples. Criticizing the views of Canon Streeter, he writes as follows: "Mr. Streeter says he knows of no living



theologian who would maintain a physical Ascension in this crude form. I have no claim to be a theologian. I can only say that as a person of ordinary education I believe, as I hope for salvation, in this literal doctrine; I believe that, whatever change may have glorified the Risen Body when it passed beyond the cloud into a new mode or sphere of existence, the earth has ever since the Ascension been the lighter by so many pounds' weight, and the sum of matter in the world the less by so many square inches of volume." (*Some Loose Stones*, 1913, p. 85.)

Speaking for myself, I feel convinced that Mr. Williams and Mr. Knox are defenders of a system of ecclesiastical trenches the advanced "elements" of which are already in occupation of an ever-advancing enemy, and that the cause for which they are fighting so bravely is utterly doomed; nevertheless I pay willing homage to their pertinacity in the defence of untenable positions, and it seems to me that so long as they defend those positions they have a much better right to be called Christians than those equally brave, sincere, and well-intentioned persons who are engaged in "reinterpretation." It is much to be desired that all priests and ministers in the various Churches would express themselves with Mr. Knox's and Mr. Williams's scrupulous avoidance of equivocal phraseology, and would show themselves equally anxious to remove all doubt as to the degree of correspondence between their words and their thoughts. Dogmatic Christianity would then cease to deserve the reproaches, now constantly brought against it by both friends and foes, that it eludes the grasp of the modern intellect by transforming itself into a wraith of indefinite form and

no substance. Laymen, also, with clearer ideas of what Christianity really teaches than they can be expected to have at present, would be able, at last, to settle accounts with their own consciences and answer a plain "Yes" or "No" to the direct question, "Are you, or are you not, a believer in the Christian religion?"<sup>1</sup>

I hasten to admit that there is no copyright in the word "Christianity," and that anyone is quite within his legal rights in giving that name to any code of belief or disbelief that he chooses to construct or to accept. There is nothing to prevent a Jew, a Mohammedan, or an African fetish-worshipper describing himself as a Christian if the whim takes him; and indeed there are Christian theologians to-day whose religious conceptions as stated by themselves seem to me to be such that they would be far more fittingly and accurately expressed in terms of Buddhist thought than Christian. The "Christ" of the writers I refer to seems to be more closely related to the "Buddha" or "Buddha-heart" of certain Mahāyāna schools than to the Jesus of history. Yet if for old associations' sake, or because of the inveterate contempt with which most Christians still regard all "heathen" religions, they prefer to paste the label "Christianity" over the pigeon-hole of their religious beliefs, who is to say them nay? Nevertheless, I think it is very highly desirable for many reasons—logical, historical, philological, moral, and religious—that the term "Christian" should

<sup>1</sup> Since these pages were written Mr. Knox has been received into the Church of Rome. This was the logical outcome of his principles, and is a fresh indication of his candour and sincerity. These are qualities which too often seem to be lacking in the Church from which he has seceded.

be strictly limited to those who adhere to the doctrines of the great historic Churches of Christendom, and who attribute no meanings to those doctrines which are inconsistent with the meanings authoritatively sanctioned.

It seems to me that those among our English-speaking contemporaries who (in addition to all docile members of the Church of Rome) have the best right to call themselves Christians are men like yourself and (in spite of your disagreement with them on the subject of hell) your correspondents Mr. Frost and Mr. Hoste; laymen like Lord Halifax and Mr. G. K. Chesterton; prelates like the Bishops of Oxford and Zanzibar; and theologians like Mr. Williams, Mr. Knox, Mr. Leighton Pullan (author of *Missionary Principles and the Primate on Kikuyu*), Mr. Oliver Chase Quick (author of *Essays in Orthodoxy*), and Professor Benjamin B. Warfield of Princeton Theological Seminary, who has published an illuminating criticism of the "Christless Christianity" of Professor D. C. Macintosh of the Yale Divinity School. (See *The Harvard Theological Review*, October 1914.) These men, and multitudes of others of whom they may be taken as representatives, continue—in spite of minor differences among themselves—to give their unquestioning adherence to the bulk of the beliefs, traditions, and dogmas upon which the Christian Church was founded, and which have been held and taught by its accredited spokesmen through all the centuries of its existence as an organized institutional religion. To this somewhat heterogeneous list of contemporary Christians I would add the name of the present Duke of Argyll, who, in spite of the coarse and vulgar rhetoric

of the speech which he delivered on the subject of the Kikuyu controversy before the English Church Union on June 22, 1915, is clearly entitled to say that the faith which he defends in vigorous if vituperative language is no other than "the Faith of the Church of the Ages," as it has been "handed down from its first guardians, whose successors brought it to our shores." Whether his Grace can be regarded as a fitting exponent of Christian *charity* is quite another question, upon which I am perhaps unqualified to express an opinion. (The speech to which I allude was published in 1915 by the Society of SS. Peter and Paul, "Publishers to the Church of England.")

The men I have named are among those who voluntarily and joyously accept the doctrinal teachings which the Christian Churches once propagated and maintained by more rigorous and violent methods than they are at liberty to employ to-day, but which those Churches still regard as essential parts of that divine revelation of which they believe themselves to be the supernaturally-guided custodians. After an age-long struggle which drenched Europe and many parts of Africa and America with the blood of millions of sufferers, men have now won for themselves the right to accept or reject those Christian doctrines as they choose, and it is a right of which an ever-increasing number of us are eagerly and thankfully availing ourselves. To me, that right to reject what I believe to be false in history, repulsive in morals, and superstitious in religion is of priceless value—one of those glorious possessions that make life truly worth living. To you, it must be little better than a superfluous privilege, for you are the

willing bondsman of authority and tradition, and in your eyes there is nothing whatever in orthodox Christianity (except the doctrine of an everlasting hell!) which can be rightly described as false, repulsive, or superstitious. But those of us who glory in, and most gladly exercise, our hard-won freedom of thought and speech are hardly "playing the game" (so it seems to me) if, while we maintain views which your Church has repeatedly declared to be "damnable heresies," we usurp a name or label which is clearly yours by every right of prescription. In the dark days of ecclesiastical supremacy the utterance of heresies immeasurably less "damnable" than those contained in these letters would have brought upon me the dread sentence *estre brusle tout vyfz*. This fate is unlikely, I hope, to befall me (at least in this world!) now that the power of priesthoods has sunk into decay; but it is not to the organized forces of Christianity that I owe gratitude for my immunity, nor is it to the Christian religion that I go for such spiritual nourishment as my nature seeks. I have not the right, and certainly I have not the wish, to call myself a Christian; and I believe that thousands of my fellow-countrymen who give themselves that name, and perhaps have never doubted that it is rightly theirs, would express themselves in terms very similar to mine if they could be persuaded to take religious questions more seriously than they usually do, and would submit their beliefs to the candid criticism and judgment of their own intelligence and their own moral perception.

## LETTER VII

It is usual for adherents of orthodox Christianity, and especially for Christian missionaries of the type criticized in these letters, to describe their hostile critics, and all who express disbelief in the Christian creed, as persons who are blind to all the spiritual verities and "crassly materialistic" in their mental outlook. It is constantly said or implied that all possible alternatives to Christianity have been tried and found wanting, that Materialism—once, apparently, Christianity's most dangerous rival—is now discredited by both philosophy and science, and that the Christian interpretation of the universe is the only one that is capable of satisfying the human heart and brain. Missionaries in China constantly assure us that the sole choice before the Chinese people is the choice between Materialism and Christianity; and when it is suggested that one might conceivably adopt a philosophy or religion which was neither Christian nor Materialist, we are told that the man who deliberately rejects "the truth as it is in Jesus" is sure to find himself floundering, sooner or latter, in the noisome abyss of "Materialism."

I shall have a few words to say in my next letter about the Materialism which is alleged to be characteristic of persons like myself; meanwhile, all I have to say is that so far am I from accepting Materialism



as a metaphysical theory of the universe that one of my chief complaints against a large number of your fellow-missionaries is not that they are too spiritualistic (I use the term in the philosophic, not the "spookish" sense), but that they are not spiritualistic enough; not that they are opponents of Materialism, but that they themselves, in many of their religious conceptions, are too grossly materialistic.

It is, I think, an easily ascertained fact that it is by no means the most orthodox Christians, as a rule, who have the keenest sense of the spiritual. Modernists seem to be far better endowed in this respect than loyal Catholics or Anglicans; and members of the Society of Friends have, I think, a quicker and surer apprehension of things spiritual than strict Protestants of the type that is so powerfully represented in the C.I.M. One might perhaps go a good deal further and say that many of the most spiritually-minded people are not religious at all in the conventional sense of the word—that is to say, they are believers in no formulated creed and are worshippers in no church. We need not feel surprised that such should be the case when we remember that it is often a realization of the gross materialism of some of the Christian dogmas in their traditional form that compels many of the most religious men and women of our time to withdraw from the creed-bound Churches.

It is hardly worth while insisting on a fact which is admitted nowadays even by enlightened office-holders in the Churches themselves. The present Dean of St. Paul's has made some appropriate comments on the subject in his *Personal Idealism and Mysticism* (see p. 150) and in his contribution to *Contentio Veritatis*



(1916 ed. pp. 293 and 306-7). The dean's criticisms are mostly directed against the materialism associated with the Roman Catholic doctrines of the Eucharist and the materiality of purgatorial fire, though he also refers to the "chaotic" teaching of his own Church with regard to the story of "a literal flight through the air" and a "geographical heaven," which forms the basis of its doctrine of the Ascension: That this doctrine has been officially taught in its crudest form by the Church of England is painfully evident from the phraseology of the fourth of the Thirty-nine Articles. The English clergy of to-day are ashamed of such teaching, of course, and try to explain it away: not so their predecessors of a pre-scientific age. If you will turn to *The Principles of the Christian Religion*, by "The Most Reverend Father in God, William, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury" (that is to say, William Wake, who died in 1737), you will find the following description of the Ascension: "He was taken up Visibly in the Presence of all his Disciples. A Cloud came down under his Feet, and he mounted by Degrees in it. They follow'd him a long time with their Eyes; till at last having lost Sight of Him, but yet still looking after him to the Place where he passed, Two Angels appeared to them, and thus confirm'd them in the Truth of what they had seen."

We saw in my last letter (p. 112) that this ridiculous doctrine, which is implicitly rejected by Dean Inge, is still treated with something more than respect by at least one scholarly writer in Oxford. It is well to remember, however, that Oxford has been described (probably by a member of your own University—Cambridge) as "the home of lost causes"!

Father Tyrrell could, on occasion, speak as severely as any Protestant divine about the materialism fostered by the Church of his adoption. Writing of sacerdotalism, for example, he says it is "based on a crudely material imagination of the source and nature of the priest's spiritual dignity and authority; on the arrogation of magical, quasi-physical powers." (*Through Scylla and Charybdis*, 1909, p. 50.)

The materialism of many Protestant beliefs has received an equally rough handling from neo-Christian critics. I have already quoted the Bishop of Hereford's statement that the Protestant masses are still, in certain respects, "intensely and intractably materialistic" (see p. 112). Archdeacon Wilberforce is another witness on the same side. "Half the epitaphs on tombstones," he says, "and most of our hymns, are sheer materialism." (*Spiritual Consciousness*, p. 52.)

That the crudely materialistic teachings of many missionaries have been regarded with disgust and amazement by "the heathen" of Asia need not be emphasized by me, seeing that frank references to the subject are to be found in the printed Reports of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910. We are told, for example, that educated Orientals find in missionary teachings ample evidence of "the gross and unspiritual way in which the materialistic West deals with spiritual matters." (*Edinburgh Reports*, vol. iv. p. 167.) It will be sufficient, perhaps, to give a single instance of the materialistic imaginings approved of by that influential Missionary Society from which you were expelled on account of your latitudinarian views on the subject of hell. In the English edition of the official organ of that Society I find an account of the funeral of an

elderly Chinese woman who had become a Christian convert. Her son also was a convert, and "the idea of this son was that she need not be mourned for in the same way as those who have no hope, for she was saved and *her body would be in the earth only for a short time*. . . . Now, is it not worth while to go to China to see the power of God in such dark hearts?" (*China's Millions*, June 1911, p. 90.)

It is but too obvious from this anecdote that the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body had been preached to these poor Chinese converts without any attempt at "re-statement"; and as no indication is given that the missionaries had found it necessary to "talk down" to their converts, or that the converts with their "dark hearts" were incapable of understanding a more spiritual version of this article of the Christian creed than that which they were given, it seems necessary to conclude that the doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh was held in all its crude literalness by the missionaries themselves. I am far from blaming them for this. The doctrine was officially taught by the Christian Churches up to a very recent date—certainly up to the time when good Churchmen felt it a sacred duty to protest against cremation. "There can be little doubt," as Sir Henry Thompson says, "that the practice of cremation in modern Europe was at first stopped, and has since been prevented in great measure, by the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body." (*Encycl. Brit.* 11th ed. vol. vii. p. 403.) Thus the missionaries whose published words I have quoted were merely simple-minded and trustful Christians who were not familiar with the labyrinthine paths of "reinterpretation." That the "advanced"

clergy of to-day are trying to disown this grotesque doctrine is an easily-verified fact. The Rev. A. W. F. Blunt, in *The Faith of the Church* (1916), admits that the words of the Creed are perhaps "still popularly understood as meaning the revivification of the material body which is laid to rest in the grave," but he adds that "the deeper thought of the Church has rejected this view." It is a pity that this "deeper thought" did not apply itself, at an earlier date, to the task of expressing itself intelligibly. Generations of English Christians might then have been spared the painful duty of chanting such puerilities as—

"On the Resurrection morning  
Soul and body meet again."

The Church of Rome, as usual, adheres faithfully to the traditional teaching. *The Student's Catholic Doctrine*, published in 1917, tells us distinctly that "the body will remain in the earth till the last day, when God will send His Angel to call the dead to life; and in an instant man's soul will be re-united to his body from which it had been separated by death. . . . Every soul will be united again to *the same body which it had in this life*, in order that, as the body was its partner in doing good or evil, it also may share its reward or punishment." Similarly Father A. V. Miller declares that Christianity "includes explicit belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ, and the docile acceptance of all His teaching, *above all, of the resurrection of the real material body*, which, together with our souls, forms one single personality."

Speaking in Westminster Abbey not long ago, Canon Charles denounced this doctrine (so recently regarded as

strictly orthodox in his own Church) as "materialistic" and as "sheer imbecility." What has the predominant Church of Christendom to say in reply to this serious charge? If an "infidel" were to describe an essential tenet of the Christian Faith as "imbecile," all the Churches would turn upon him and rend him—or have him prosecuted under the blasphemy laws. How comes it that the clergy of rival Christian bodies are able, with complete impunity, to hurl abusive epithets at one another's most cherished beliefs?

It is an instructive fact that it is precisely the grotesquely materialistic portions of Christian teaching that have always met with the greatest ridicule and opposition from the Chinese as well as from the Hindus; indeed, the very doctrine of the resurrection of the material body has been plaintively alluded to by missionaries as forming one of the most serious stumbling-blocks to the advance of Christianity, not only in countries with a venerable civilization of their own, like China, but even among such backward peoples as the natives of Madagascar. (See *Edinburgh Reports*, vol. iv. p. 298.)

It is highly interesting, in reading the accounts given by missionaries of their arguments with friendly unbelievers among the Chinese, to find that the doctrines which meet with the most decided opposition are no other than those which modern criticism is at last slowly compelling Christianity to surrender. Edkins, for example, mentions "a man of fine intellect" who was quite willing to admit the good that existed in much of the Christian teaching, but could not be persuaded to believe in the miracles or in the divinity of Jesus. More recently (see *China's Millions*, 1912,

p. 157), we are told of some "priests and readers" who showed considerable intellectual curiosity with regard to Christianity, and were ready to admit that "Jesus Christ was a good man," and that "they knew we were earnest in our preaching"; but although "courteous in manner" they were "distinctly hostile to the truth," for alas! they denied the bodily resurrection of Jesus; thereby showing themselves, to that extent at least, fully abreast of the most recent theological scholarship in the Christian West.

Further evidence to the same effect may be gathered from the Reports of the Edinburgh Conference, to which I have referred. "The virgin birth, the miracles, and the resurrection of Christ are obstacles noted by several writers, also the divinity of Christ, which a Chinese writer says is the greatest intellectual hindrance among scholars" (vol. iv. p. 44). Precisely the same melancholy state of affairs is reported from Japan. "The doctrines of the Deity of Christ, the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, and others involving the miraculous or supernatural, are denied or treated with contempt as mere superstitions." (*Ibid.* p. 87.) A missionary in China asserts that "laxity of moral thought and consequent dulness of conscience make the Chinese generally very deaf to the glad tidings of great joy." (*Ibid.* p. 43.) Perhaps other things besides these alleged imperfections in the Chinese character have made the Chinese people deaf to those "glad tidings"!

We know from the painful experience of many centuries that Christianity, while always insisting on its pre-eminent right to be called a religion of love, has again and again proved itself to be, in practice, a



religion of the most virulent hate. I think it is Montaigne who says somewhere that "there is no enmity so extreme as the Christian." It may or may not be true that Christians "love *one another*," but it will hardly be disputed that they seem to have singularly little love to spare for outsiders; or at any rate that their "love" for non-Christians, heretics, and infidels manifests itself in remarkably unpleasant ways.

The fact that Christian intolerance of "heathen" faiths is diminishing *pari passu* with the fading of the belief that non-Christians are everlastingly damned seems to be more than a mere coincidence. A person who sincerely believes that the vast majority of mankind are doomed to suffer unending anguish can hardly be otherwise than deficient in sympathy for his fellow-men; and as breadth and depth of sympathy usually appear to co-exist with high moral attainment, it would seem that a real belief in the eternal doom of all who do not share one's religious opinions must indicate a comparatively low degree of ethical development. On this point Professor Stratton has some interesting remarks in his *Psychology of the Religious Life*. He shows that a belief in hell and a readiness to emphasize the torments of the damned seem to be connected with that "cruel fascination of suffering" and that "primitive instinct for torture" which are characteristic of many children and of uncivilized mankind, and he points out that "a primary heartlessness in many men makes them take a kind of pleasure in witnessing or imagining pain in others." He remarks that "as the ingenious contrivance of tortures for the damned has given an imaginative satisfaction to the savagery of some, so the persecution of heretics and infidels has, under a



religious gloss, sometimes physically gratified what was nothing but a wolfish thirst for blood." G. A. Coe writes in a somewhat similar strain. "When a crowd of Christians," he says, "applauds a revivalist for picturesquely assigning to a savage hell persons who disagree with his theology, what happens is a flaring up of instinctive pugnacity—the same thing that makes men enjoy a dog fight." (*The Psychology of Religion*, 1916, p. 124.) Stratton also shows that "with the growth of human sentiment" there comes a gradual "revulsion from the worst features" of such doctrines as that of eternal damnation, "and the duration if not the intensity of the agony is reduced"; so that "even among those who would hardly formulate their belief as favouring the salvation of all, there is a growing hesitation in affirming a positive belief in eternal punishment. The change in the informal, or unofficial, creed of Christendom may well be due in part to the growing sense of kinship with men of different nationalities and different religious faiths."

Mr. Frost and his friends of the C.I.M. would probably repel with intense indignation the suggestion that their belief in the damnation of unbelievers was an indication of their own moral immaturity and their lack of sympathy for their fellow-men; and it may be only fair to them to admit that in their case the immaturity is perhaps not so much of a moral as of an intellectual kind. They are held fast in the grip of religious beliefs which to a large extent are shockingly barbarous and degrading, and they are incapable of the mental effort necessary to set themselves free. Their grotesque and misshapen Creed is like a wicked stepmother in a fairy-tale, who has fed them from the

days of their docile and impressionable childhood with the poisonous and debilitating products of her own nauseous cookery, and, in order to debar them from access to more wholesome nourishment, has locked the doors of their minds and thrown away the key.

That the survival of the hell-fire doctrine is not wholly due to undeveloped sympathy, or to a lack of delicacy in ethical perception, seems to be shown by the general readiness of believers to admit that the doctrine presents serious moral difficulties, and that they would gladly escape from it if escape were possible. Even the Roman Catholics appear to perceive that the orthodox teaching about hell is not precisely a thing to be contemplated with unalloyed satisfaction (see p. 49). There is no doubt whatever as to what Christians would have thought of it if they had found it elsewhere than in their own religion. In my first letter (p. 19) I mentioned a Roman Catholic book called *The New Pelagianism*, in which the doctrine of final salvation for all was severely handled, and the orthodox doctrine of an everlasting hell vigorously defended. This book, published simultaneously in London and St. Louis (U.S.A.) as recently as 1915, bears the *nil obstat* of a Censor Deputatus and the imprimatur of a bishop. It contains a paragraph which throws a very curious and instructive light on the workings of the Christian (or perhaps it would be fairer to say the ecclesiastical) mind when engaged in the painful task of trying to reconcile the modern conscience to distasteful or obsolescent dogmas. The author is speculating as to what would have been the attitude of the Christian world towards the doctrine of everlasting damnation if it had not been adopted

by Christianity, but had been "discovered in any fresh found cult of the remote East." Many Christians, he assures us, "would have regarded it as an esoteric mystery of deepest interest. But when, on the contrary, it belongs to the religion *from which* revolt is made, there is readily discovered in it a vulnerable quality, and assault is led against the doctrine without delay."

Now if this hypothetical situation were the true one—if in very truth it had been Christianity that taught universal salvation, and Buddhism, let us say that taught everlasting damnation—I do not hesitate to affirm that Christian writers, so far from regarding the endless-hell theory as one of "esoteric mystery" and of "deepest interest," would have promptly seized upon it with the utmost eagerness as a signal proof of the degraded character of the "heathen" religion. Recognizing that the enemy had put a most potent weapon into their hands, they would never have wearied of denouncing the ghastly barbarity of a creed which could find place for a tenet so inexpressibly hideous. Christian missionaries would have reserved their bitterest sarcasms and their fiercest maledictions for a doctrine which, as they would have insisted, was sufficient in itself to prove the Satanic authorship of the Buddhist religion. Nothing else is required, they would have said, to indicate the utter unfitness of that faith to be mentioned in the same breath with the divinely-inspired message of Christian love which brought to suffering mankind the assurance of ultimate salvation for all. Buddhism, they would have insisted, was irremediably tainted with infamy for inventing or accepting a doctrine which was grossly

insulting to God and to human nature, and utterly incompatible with the existence of justice, beneficence, or rationality in the scheme of the universe.

And would not the Christian critics of such a Buddhism have been entirely justified in their reproaches and denunciations? I think they would. Setting hypothetical situations aside, however, what do we find are the real facts? It is Buddhism which teaches universal salvation, and Christianity which holds forth the "glad tidings" of everlasting torment for some, at least, and probably for the vast majority of the human race, past, present, and to come; and Christian missionaries, conscious as they are of the inky gloom of their own eschatology, have nevertheless had the amazing audacity to declare that Buddhism as compared with Christianity is "profoundly pessimistic," and have contemptuously and arrogantly described it not as the "Light" but as the "Night" of Asia.

Christian missionaries have distinguished themselves by their remarkable ingenuity in devising opprobrious descriptions and epithets for the Eastern faiths which it is their cherished ambition to destroy. One of these missionaries—Dr. Edkins—described Buddhism as "philosophy gone mad"; and his reason for this judgment was that Buddhism was "philosophy assuming the prerogatives which can only belong to a heavenly religion." Well, I think we may congratulate the peoples of Eastern Asia on having been left—until the coming of Christianity—in blissful ignorance of a "heavenly religion" which consigned all their sages, all their ancestors, all but a minute fraction of their contemporaries, and all their unborn descendants who should pass through life as "heathen," to an

eternity of unutterable anguish. Nor need we pity them for having had to content themselves for so many centuries with a Confucianism which knew nothing of the wiles and inventions of priests, and which laid far more stress on man's relations to his fellow-men in this world than on the future of his soul in a problematical world beyond the grave. Nor need we condole with the Chinese for having had to put up with a "philosophy gone mad," which, for all its madness, has never imperilled the sanity of its own adherents. Doubtless Confucianism and Buddhism have their faults, but in some respects, at least, they need fear no comparison with a "heavenly" religion which, in cynical disregard of its own heavenliness, has not contented itself with inventing an everlasting hell in the world beyond the grave for all who die without its blessing, but has also, on countless occasions, gone out of its way to turn earth itself into a hell for the living.

I wonder whether your very natural detestation of the theory of everlasting punishment has led you to overlook the fact that it was partly owing to this theory that the Church, in its early days, made headway against "paganism" and gradually became triumphant throughout Europe? The early Christians, as Lecky says, "maintained that an eternity of torture was reserved for the entire human race then existing in the world, beyond the range of their own community," and "made the assertion of this doctrine one of their main instruments of success." Lecky's comment on this is a very apposite one, and should be seriously pondered by those who imagine that the

early Christians were brimful of tenderness and love for the whole world, and that the world basely repaid their love with malice, hatred, and all uncharitableness. "There can be little doubt," he says, "that a chief cause of the hostility felt against the Christian Church was the intolerant aspect it at that time displayed. The Romans were prepared to tolerate almost any form of religion that would tolerate others. . . . But the Christian teachers taught that all religions, except their own and that of the Jews, were constructed by devils, and that all who dissented from their Church must be lost." In principle, you will note, there is very little to choose between the attitude of the early Christians and that of Mr. Frost and his friends; for they, too, hold that all unbelievers, whether they have heard of Christ or not, will be consigned to a hell where they will suffer conscious torment for ever. Lecky goes on to observe that the pagan philosopher who opposed Christianity "could not foresee the ghastly histories of the Inquisition, of the Albigenses, or of St. Bartholomew; but he could scarcely doubt that the Christians, when in the ascendant, would never tolerate rites which they believed to be consecrated to devils, or restrain, in the season of their power, a religious animosity which they scarcely bridled when they were weak." As the endless-hell doctrine was, as you believe, untrue, you must admit that Christianity, to some extent at least, made its fortune through trading with a lie.

I need hardly remind you, in this connection, of the innumerable other lies on which the Christian Church built up its mighty edifice. Most of them are associated with the history of the Papacy, and doubtless



you yourself have no desire to extenuate the corrupt practices of Romanist theologians and the evil machinations of the Antichrist who wears the triple tiara. The forged Decretals are described by one of your fellow-Protestants—a distinguished French theologian—as “the most colossal and barefaced fraud of which history has to tell,” and perhaps this is hardly an exaggeration. But candour will compel you to admit that even the text of your own ultimate authority—the inspired Word of God—has been grievously tampered with by the blasphemous hand of man. I will not dwell upon the interpolations in the New Testament, because you would probably refuse to recognize them as such; but how is it that Protestant writers who are so ready to denounce the forgeries foisted on Christendom in the interests of the Papacy are so curiously silent about Deuteronomy and Daniel?

You say that the theory of everlasting damnation reflects on the honour of God, and, assuming that a personal Deity exists, I entirely concur with you. But many of us feel that, if indeed there be a personal God who is omnipotent, this is far from being the only Christian doctrine that reflects upon his honour. This was realized ages ago by some brave heretics whom the infuriated Church proceeded, in the customary Christian fashion, to exterminate. The Pelagians used words almost identical with your own (though in respect of a doctrine to which you have raised no objection) when they declared that “the doctrine of original sin and natural corruption, by which persons are supposed to be born under a necessity of sinning, *did cast a reflection on the honour and justice of God.*”



These words I quote from Wall's *History of Infant Baptism*. The author adds a comment of his own to the effect that "this argument was plausible among the vulgar." I venture to suggest that its plausibility ceased long ago to be confined to the "vulgar." It is now coming to be admitted by an ever-increasing number that the whole "scheme of salvation" is full of moral enormities; and I think you will admit, on reflection, that if you yourself take the liberty of singling out one objectionable doctrine for censure, you can hardly withhold from other men the right to denounce what they consider reprehensible in other doctrines. To your fellow-Christian Jean Réville, "the God who can only forgive men's trespasses by inflicting infinite suffering upon an innocent person in place of the guilty, is a monstrous God whom we cannot adore, seeing the meanest man with any delicacy of conscience is morally superior to such a god." It was an English clergyman of the 'nineties who made the startling admission that "the orthodox Atonement is as vile as anything to be found in heathendom," and that the addition to it of the doctrine of predestination "makes it infinitely viler still." The two doctrines constituted, in his opinion, "the most savage superstition which has ever existed in the world. The god of orthodoxy is the very wickedest being which it is possible for the human mind to conceive." (*The Fortnightly Review*, December 1892.)

I know it is often difficult for submissive Christians who have never given much serious thought to the details of their creed to realize the essential meaning of a doctrine which comes to them dressed up in the fine robes of pious verbiage and sanctified tradition; it

might be good for such Christians, perhaps, if they would sit at the feet of a little child, who in these simple and unsophisticated words is said to have given a vivid picture of one aspect, at least, of a prominent doctrine of the Christian faith. "God was very angry, and said He must kill somebody. Jesus said, Kill me."

In view of the utterly divergent opinions that now exist in non-Roman Christendom with regard to the topics discussed in these letters, am I not justified in begging you to consider very seriously whether the work of converting the hundreds of millions of people you call "heathen" should not be postponed until Christians have made up their minds as to what the doctrines of Christianity really are, and until they can declare with an absolutely clear conscience that their gospel is not only irrefragably true but is also of such a character as to be really deserving of that laudatory description so often applied to it in the mission-field—"glad tidings of great joy"? In making this suggestion I do not by any means wish to advocate the discontinuance of all the activities of the Christian missions in China. I have the highest admiration for a great deal of the work done by those missions in the spheres of medicine, education, and general philanthropy. You will fully understand, I trust, that my criticisms and suggestions refer solely to the labours of those who are devoting themselves to the propagation of doctrinal Christianity and to the weakening, if not the deliberate destruction, of the existing moral and spiritual bases of Chinese civilization.

You may think it a horrible and blasphemous

proposal on my part that the holy work of Christian proselytism should be suspended or abandoned. I have been emboldened to make it, however, by my knowledge of the fact that the same suggestion has actually been put forward by members of the English clergy and has received the support of a prominent member of the Roman Catholic priesthood. Writing in *The Nineteenth Century and After* only two months before the great war broke out, Father Bernard Vaughan gave utterance to these striking words: "From my observation I am inclined to agree with the Chaplain Fellow of Trinity, Oxford, who, speaking of Anglican missionaries and the differences in doctrine among them, says: 'If we ourselves have no clear idea of what the Christian revelation really is, then it is much better to leave the unfortunate heathen alone.' One thing is certain, and it is this, that what with Christian doctrine, Christian morality, and Christian ritual ever shifting among non-Catholic missionaries, it is almost impossible for a Chinaman, or a Japanese, or Mussulman, to discover what Christianity really is."

Let me quote, in addition, the words used by the Bishop of Zanzibar (himself a missionary bishop) in an Open Letter to his episcopal brother of St. Albans: "At the present time, having regard to her exceedingly chaotic system of Truth," the Church of England is "entirely unfit to send missionaries to heathen or Muhammadan lands." And I think, if the bishop had considered the matter a little further, he would have seen no reason to confine this judgment to his own Church.

I trust you will agree with me that the sentiments expressed in the foregoing quotations are worthy of

being carefully weighed by all missionaries, and also by all those who are the moral and material supporters of the costly structure of Foreign Missions. If, however, you reject as impious or impracticable the proposal that all Christian proselytism should be suspended, I have another suggestion to put before you. You have boldly admitted that the doctrine of everlasting torment, if true, "brands the character of God with infinite disgrace." It is eminently satisfactory that you should have committed yourself thus far. Will you not be bolder still, and say openly that it condemns him as a Fiend? If the Directors of the C.I.M. were to ignore a challenge of so terrific a character as this—for you would be practically charging them with Devil-worship—the public would naturally conclude that your opponents were afraid to meet you in open controversy, or were so ashamed of their revolting creed that they dared not raise their voices in its defence. This would obviously shatter whatever claims they may possess to be the bearers of a divine message to the "heathen," and might even lead men to ask whether the time had not arrived for the "heathen" East to send its missionaries to the Christian West.

## LETTER VIII

VERY real wants at the present time in matters religious are clarity of thought and lucidity of speech. Too many people are content to leave the things that appertain to religion in a confused jumble, either because they shrink from the labour of bringing order into chaos, or because they have a superstitious idea that vagueness is a necessary attribute of holiness, and that it is better to leave sacred things in the dim religious light of shrine and cloister than to bring them out for critical examination into the glare of sunlight. In Anglo-Saxon society, at least, the free discussion of religious topics is still apt to be frowned upon. One reason often given for the avoidance of such topics is that by uttering views of an unconventional or heterodox nature you may be trampling upon your neighbour's deepest feelings and violating the sanctities of his inner life. Too often, however, it may be suspected that the true reason of your neighbour's sensitiveness is a wholly different one: he is afraid that if you penetrate into that inner sanctuary of his you will find it empty, or in a state of disorder which will infallibly betray the infrequency of his own visits. "I always have a suspicion," says a scholarly observer of human nature, "that if a man says that a subject is too sacred to discuss, he probably also finds it too sacred to think

about very much either." (A. C. Benson, *Joyous Gard*, p. 78.)

I have already remarked that it is no longer a crime punishable by torture and death to repudiate the Church's authority or to deny her creeds. In the British Army and Navy, indeed, the old persecuting spirit is not quite extinct, and English magistrates have been known to abuse their position by showering insults upon free-thinking witnesses who refuse to be browbeaten into admitting a belief in the Christian deity;<sup>1</sup> but on the whole the modern State is showing increasing reluctance to meddle with the individual's beliefs and disbeliefs, and we may reasonably hope that he will never again be deprived of his personal liberty or political rights on account of his refusal to sign a declaration of religious orthodoxy. "In England we are now fairly tolerant," as Mr. St. George Stock has remarked; "but we have become so in exact proportion as the State has become secularized." (*Looking Facts in the Face*, 1910, p. 52.) The Church, indeed, is still bitterly hostile to those who reject her claims, and this hostility (which is powerless nowadays to manifest itself in the shape of dungeon and stake) often takes the disagreeable form of slander and misrepresentation. The Church (I refer not merely to the Church of Rome) also does its best to boycott all literary productions that are inimical to its interests, and through its powerful organizations, its great wealth, its social and political influence, and also through the strong hold which it has over a large section of the Press, it is able to achieve very considerable success in checking the

<sup>1</sup> For an example of this, see G. M. Trevelyan's *De Haeretico Comburendo*, Cambridge, England, 1914, pp. 4-5.

circulation and counteracting the influence of "infidel" literature. In spite of all this, there is no longer any very cogent reason, even from the not very exalted point of view of practical expediency, why every man who hates cant and insincerity and hypocrisy in all their forms should not make a determined effort to come to an understanding with his own religious consciousness and cease to pretend that he is a believing Christian when he knows in his heart of hearts that he is nothing of the kind.

These letters have already made it abundantly clear to you that you were fully justified in expressing doubts as to whether my own religious sentiments and beliefs were compatible with Christianity.<sup>1</sup> I would gladly have refrained from offering a statement, however meagre and incomplete, concerning my own religious position—such statements must always have an unpleasantly egotistic flavour—but to prevent any possible misconception on your part I may perhaps be permitted to respond to your observations on this subject by a few further remarks which will show you why it is that I make no claim to be regarded as your fellow-Christian.

I have already explained that, although it would be absurd to question the legal right of the modernizing or liberalizing theologians and their lay followers to call themselves Christians, I think it would be fairer to orthodox members of the Christian Churches, much less confusing to the average educated layman, and more in accordance with historical accuracy, the continuity of religious tradition, and the usage of centuries,

<sup>1</sup> See Introduction, p. x.



if the term "Christian" were strictly confined to those who can honestly and unequivocally confess themselves to be whole-hearted believers in those characteristically Christian doctrines which the great historic Churches have always regarded as essential to the integrity of the Faith "once delivered to the saints." So long as the Church was able to rely on the necessary co-operation of the State, it punished all who dared to express disbelief in those doctrines with the harshest penalties which human ingenuity could devise; and we are surely justified in assuming that it was not for the sake of giving picturesque emphasis to her merely temporary opinions about legitimately-disputable "unessentials" that the divinely-guided "Bride of Christ" committed unspeakable atrocities which have earned for her an immortality of infamy. Now as I myself am a disbeliever in most of the essential and characteristic tenets of historic Christianity—including the orthodox doctrines relating to the alleged Godhead, moral perfection, and divine mission of Jesus of Nazareth—and as I therefore go even further than most of the Liberals and Modernists in my rejection of the Christian claims, it is obviously impossible that I can apply to myself a label which I would withhold from them.

Nevertheless, it may interest you to know that, in spite of my energetic protests, I have been assured by some of my clerical friends (of whom I have many) that I am as much entitled to be styled "Christian" as they are. In view of the knowledge which I happen to possess of some of their own little heresies it is conceivable that this is not so remote from the truth as might be supposed! The claim that they so indulgently make on my behalf, however, is not one that I should dream of

putting forward for myself. It seems to be mainly based on the fact that I am not a member of that nefarious gang of professional soul-extinguishers known to orthodox Christians as "Materialists"; indeed, it is solely through the sermons and writings of Christians that the manifold iniquities, if not the actual existence, of that unholy group of stealthy conspirators against the common weal has come to my knowledge.

By saying that I am not a Materialist I mean that the world of sense, as we know it, is an abstract thing, unintelligible and self-contradictory, and that we are therefore compelled to believe it to be controlled and transcended by a world of reason which is also immanent in it. Mechanical determinism as a theory of the universe seems to me, on philosophical (that is to say metaphysical) grounds, to be inadmissible, however true it may be for the limits which circumscribe the activities of science. There is, I think, no real antithesis between the spiritual and the phenomenal, but I believe that the material world, if contemplated *sub specie aeternitatis*, would be found to be spirit, and that a spiritual interpretation of the universe is the only possible one. In other words, I regard spirit as the ultimate basis of reality. Again, deeply impressed as I am by the eternal wonder of the human mind and personality, I cannot believe that the consciousness and the self-consciousness of man are mere epiphenomena, merely the fortuitous results of bodily activities or molecular motion. I cannot accept the naturalistic hypothesis that mind is (to use James Ward's phrases) "secondary and episodic," or a mere collateral product that arises "as often as matter falls into the appropriate organic condition." I cannot persuade myself that the human spirit is the product of, or solely dependent on,

physical causes, or that it is the mere creature of the material things that it employs and shapes to its own uses or through which it energizes.

The Abbé Loisy has told us—and I agree with him—that “the question which lies at the bottom of the religious question to-day is not whether the Pope is infallible, or whether there are errors in the Bible, or even whether Christ is God or whether a revelation exists, but whether the universe is inert matter, empty, deaf, soulless, pitiless; whether men’s conscience finds in it no echo truer and more real than itself.” I agree with James Ward, too, when he says (in his *Realm of Ends*) that “either the world is not rational, or man does not stand alone and this life is not all,” and it is not the former of these alternatives that I believe to be true.

There is one point, however, about which I hope there will be no mistake. When I say that I cannot accept a materialistic theory of the universe, I do not mean that I am ready to join in the hue and cry of orthodox Christians after what they love to stigmatize as “Materialism,” which very often turns out to be nothing more dreadful than a sturdy belief in the reality of scientific progress, a desire to exploit the world for the good of mankind rather than for “the glory of God,” a distrust of the “truths” (so often proved to be untruths) of theology, a refusal to believe in the supernaturalism specially associated with the Christian religion, a persuasion that man’s moral and spiritual progress depends more upon the amelioration of social and industrial conditions than on the dissemination of ecclesiastical dogmas, and a firm conviction that Churchless truth is infinitely better than a truthless Church.

In view of the brutal frankness with which I have dealt with “sacred” things in some of the foregoing

pages, it may surprise you to learn that some of the great mystics of all faiths—Christian, Jewish, Sūfi, Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist—are to me a powerful source of attraction. I am not surprised that numbers of the Christian mystics have been suspected or accused of doctrinal heresy, and that many of their works have been condemned by the Church, for however firmly individual mystics may believe in the dogmas of their creed it is very evident that those dogmas form no essential part of their religion, or at least that their mystical experiences are readily susceptible of interpretations which necessitate no dogmatic assumptions of a specifically Christian type. Christian mystics, as E. Hermann has said (*The Meaning and Value of Mysticism*, p. 372), “have often laid more emphasis upon their mysticism than upon their Christianity.” Even in the sermons preached by Meister Eckhart his ecclesiastical superiors found no fewer than twenty-eight questionable “items,” and seventeen of these were finally pronounced, by a papal bull, to be heretical. Molinos, the great Spanish mystic, was consigned to a dungeon on account of his heresies, and the Beghards and Beguines and many other mystics and mystical sects also felt the full weight of the Church’s disapproval. Many mystics (of whom Madame Guyon was one) have owed their escape from condemnation only to the fortunate circumstance that their doctrines were capable of two entirely different interpretations, one orthodox, the other heterodox. (See Delacroix, *Études d’Histoire et de Psychologie du Mysticisme*, p. 270.) Mysticism, indeed, has been well described by Royce as “the ferment of the faiths, the forerunner of religious liberty, the inaccessible refuge of the nobler heretics.” The mystics, as the same philosopher has told us, “may be of any human creed.

Their doctrine passes ‘Like night from land to land,’ and ‘has strange power of speech.’” (*The World and the Individual*, First Series, p. 85.) “All mystics,” said one of them, “speak the same language, for they come from the same country.” A sympathetic study of the mystics compels us to recognize the deeply significant facts that an identity of spiritual experience is discernible beneath all the varieties of doctrinal superstructure which we find in their writings, and that the great mystics of every religion are united by the invisible bonds of a spiritual kinship. Perhaps you will understand what I mean if you will take up that beautiful little book, the *Theologia Germanica*, and consider what changes would be necessary before it could be turned into a handbook of either Buddhist or Taoist mysticism. I believe you would find that the omissions and modifications which would be necessary to make it perfectly intelligible to a spiritually-minded Taoist or Buddhist who had never heard of Christianity would not affect, in the aggregate, more than four pages of the standard English translation. Similarly it has been said of the mystical writings of Thomas Traherne that merely by the omission of a few passages they might be fitted “for the use of members of any creed or sect.” Many of the beautiful devotional compositions of the Quakers and allied sects, and of men like Gerrard Winstanley, contain much that might be restated in terms of Hindu or Buddhist mysticism. More easily still, perhaps, might the works of some of our modern Western mystics be re-written in terms of Buddhist thought. Many of Maeterlinck’s writings might be so treated; some of the nature-mystics (poets and prose-writers) of modern Europe are to some extent Buddhists without knowing it; in Edward Carpenter the Buddhi-

istic strain is plainly visible; and even in Rudolf Eucken it has been said (rightly or wrongly) by one of his critics that he is "an idealistic mystic who should find his true refuge in Buddhism." The Sermons of the late Archdeacon Wilberforce are a conspicuous instance of how the Christian mysticism of modern times reaches out in a Buddhistic direction. If anyone who has an adequate acquaintance with the works of mystics of the T'ien-t'ai and Ch'an schools of Buddhism will glance through Wilberforce's books—for example, those entitled *Seeing God*, *Mystic Immanence*, and *Inward Vision*—he will see that there would be very small difficulty in adapting them to the spiritual needs, and restating them in the customary phraseology, of Chinese Buddhists. Nor would the process of adaptation necessitate any serious interference with the archdeacon's fundamental ideas.

"Know this, O man, sole root of sin in thee  
Is not to know thine own divinity."

These lines (by J. Rhoades) were often quoted by Wilberforce with profound appreciation—indeed he once declared that for him they had become "quite an obsession"; nevertheless, it can hardly be questioned that the idea expressed in these lines is more characteristic of Mahāyāna Buddhism than it is of orthodox Christianity. The Buddhist tells us that the true divinity of man—which he calls *Fo-hsin* "the Buddha-heart," or *Fo-hsing* "the Buddha-nature"—is concealed behind the veil of *Avidyā* (*zu-ming*), which means nescience, or lack of spiritual insight. This *Avidyā* is what the Christian mystic Tauler would describe as blindness to the Divine Light. When a man awakes from the illusory dreams which arise from



Avidyā, and his spiritual eyesight (*t'ien-yen*, to use the Chinese phrase) is clarified, he recognizes the Buddhahood within him—his own spiritual self, which is part-transcendent and part-immanent—and through that very recognition enters into the *unio mystica* with the eternal Buddha-nature or Dharmakāya which he shares with all living beings.<sup>1</sup> This theory is tersely summed up by Chinese Buddhists in the four words *chien hsing ch'êng Fo*, which signify that to behold or know one's own nature as it really is in its essence is to become Buddha. The wisdom or enlightenment which alone can destroy the veil of illusion that conceals from view the Buddha-nature is very far from being a merely intellectual virtue; it has its ethical side also, and it is of great interest to note that here Indian and Chinese thought come into contact with Greek. (Cf. Adam's *Vitality of Platonism*, pp. 130 f. and 217.) Now this eternal and universal Buddhahood or Buddha-nature is practically identical with what mystics of different types and schools would variously describe as the Inward Light, the Beyond that is Within, the Wise Silence, the Indwelling Christ, the Christ-Self, the Inborn Logos, the Immanent Godhead. Here it may be mentioned that it is precisely because Buddhists recognize, as one of the fundamental truths of their religion, that all living beings truly participate in the *Fo-hsing* or Buddha-nature—what archdeacon Wilberforce would call "Christ"—that such a conception as that of the everlasting damnation of multitudes of men, or of a single one, is totally irreconcilable with, and is therefore wholly absent from, Buddhist teachings. It is a significant fact that Wilberforce himself, firmly

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, by D. T. Suzuki, pp. 35-37, 115 ff. and 290 ff.



believing as he did in the immanence of the Godhead, or of "Christ," in all human beings, including evil-doers and "the heathen," unreservedly accepted the logical conclusions to which this theory pointed; hence he utterly repudiated the traditional Christian teaching regarding the eternal ruin of human souls and the doctrine of an everlasting hell. It is hardly necessary to add that he was careful to distinguish between the "immanent Christ" and the historic Jesus, just as the mystical Buddhists (and indeed all Buddhists who have a real grasp of their own religion) differentiate between the "immanent Buddha"—as well as the transcendent Buddha of the "Lotus" and similar sūtras—and the historical figure, who, as Prince Siddharta, left his father's palace to become a wandering ascetic. The "true spiritual self of each of us," says Wilberforce, "is one with the Christ; indeed, in a sense, is the Christ" (*Inward Vision*, p. 103); but he also emphasizes what he deliberately calls "the distinction" between "the Lord Jesus" and "the universal mystic Christ," which is another name for the "immanence of God." A similar distinction is drawn with increasing boldness by many of the most daring of our theologians and preachers. "Paul's Christ," says the Rev. T. Rhondda Williams, "is greater than any single human incarnation of the Divine could be," and "no single interpretation of the word will unlock the meaning of all the references. . . . There is no doubt that the Christ-conception existed before Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Working Faith of a Liberal Theologian*, p. 158. See also *Mysticism and the Creed*, by W. F. Cobb, D.D., pp. 120 ff., and Bishop Boyd Carpenter's *The Witness of Religious Experience*, 1916, pp. 61-2, 103. Cf. *The Future of Christianity*, by Reginald H. Crompton, 1916, pp. 245 ff. In this last-named book, which is deserving of careful perusal, no attempt is made to preserve

The present revival of interest in mysticism is undoubtedly due, in large part, to the widespread decay of belief in dogmatic Christianity, and to the hope which animates many of the educated laity and the "advanced" clergy of our time that even if neither Liberalism nor Modernism succeeds in giving Christianity a new lease of life, copious draughts of a rejuvenating elixir may still be drawn from the perennial fountain of mysticism. It is very doubtful, however, whether this last hope will be realized, or whether the Christian Church could ever bring itself to accept the terms which a triumphant mysticism would undoubtedly impose. Many theologians—not only those of the Ritschlian school—have declared that mysticism is essentially opposed to traditional Christianity and constitutes a serious danger to all forms of the Faith that by any stretch of the religious imagination can be termed orthodox. E. Hermann (*The Meaning and Value of Mysticism*, pp. 290, 291) declares that the "rapidly increasing mystical literature" of to-day, even when it professes to be "specifically Christian," is "essentially a polemic against the historic Christian faith"; and he also tells us that the antagonism of mystics towards professional theology is "often tinged with contempt." However this may be, there is good reason to believe that the leanings towards mysticism which are now so noticeable among some of the most spiritually-minded men and women of our time will tend in no small measure to bring about one most

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even the semblance of Christian orthodoxy. Mr. Crompton points out (p. 255) that "the miserable failure of Christianity is not due to the Eternal Christ, but to the mistaken conception that Jesus was the Christ made flesh. To a greater, or lesser, extent, depending very largely on our own will, the Christ is in every man."

desirable consummation—the decay of the arrogance and intolerance hitherto shown by the representatives of Western religious thought towards all the faiths of “heathendom,” and the growth of a new bond of spiritual sympathy between the truly religious minds of all nations and all creeds.

But if I am to continue my egotistic remarks about my own religious position, what am I to say about those foundation-rocks of almost every creed—Immortality and God? As to whether human individuals as such do or do not “survive” the death of the body, I will not venture to express a decided opinion, for the simple but entirely adequate reason that I have not met with sufficient evidence to justify a conclusion one way or the other. Though I have been, for several years, a deeply interested member of the Society for Psychical Research, I find myself unconvinced, as yet, by the arguments whereby some of my fellow-members—Sir Oliver Lodge and others—profess to have demonstrated that the individual human personality survives the crisis of death. Nevertheless, the subject is one on which I maintain an open mind; and if some day I awake in the next world and realize from personal experience that Sir Oliver and his friends were correct in their interpretation of the evidence available to them in their lifetimes, I shall take the earliest opportunity to offer them my sincere congratulations—always provided, of course, that the rules permit of telepathic communications being transmitted from the tropical regions of the spirit-world to the temperate. For the present, I have already gone so far as to declare my provisional acceptance of the theory that “man does not stand alone and this life is not all,” and there

I leave a question on which, as it appears to me, neither Religion nor Psychic Research has given us the right to dogmatize.

I am afraid that candour compels me to confess to a feeling of similar uncertainty with regard to God; but I am emboldened to make this terrible confession by my knowledge of the fact that within Christianity itself—not to mention other religions—the different conceptions of the Godhead are hopelessly irreconcilable. The Rev. George Gordon Macleod and the Rev. T. Rhondda Williams (if I may take these two as representatives of utterly opposed types of Christian thought) both call themselves Christians, and theoretically they worship the same God; yet I cannot help thinking that Mr. Rhondda Williams would recoil with horror from the hideous monster adored by Mr. Macleod, and I fear it is no less probable that Mr. Macleod would not hesitate to denounce Mr. Rhondda Williams's God as one whom you could "spit at and live" or (to use another of Mr. Macleod's illuminating if disrespectful phrases) as a mere "indiarubber god" (see p. 22).

All educated Christians, I may be told, would repudiate Mr. Macleod's God with disgust. But what right have they to do so, seeing that Mr. Macleod derived every detail of his portraiture direct from a book which all Christians believe to be part of the inspired word of the very Deity whose main purpose in inspiring it was to give mankind a trustworthy revelation of himself? I gravely doubt whether Mr. Rhondda Williams has as much right as Mr. Macleod has to declare that his God is the God of Christianity; and I think a candid judge would tell us that Mr. Rhondda Williams's God is very much nearer in type

to the God of the "heathen" Cleanthes, or to the God of the "heathen" Seneca, or to the God of the "heathen" Rabindranath Tagore, than to the God hitherto worshipped by the vast majority of professing Christians. For my own part I would much rather do homage to the God of "pagan" Stoicism, or the God of Hindu mysticism, or the God vaguely hinted at by Confucianism, than abase myself before that Jewish tribal Deity who still excites devotional fervour among hundreds if not thousands of Christian missionaries in China. I may be reminded that it is not the Old Testament God but the God revealed by Jesus that Christians are supposed to worship; but what does the difference amount to in practice? Have not thousands of the twentieth-century disciples of Jesus shown themselves ready and anxious to believe that the God revealed by Jesus was capable of sending flocks of bellicose angels to save the lives of a few British soldiers at Mons, while he failed to depute even a single baby-angel to protect the women and children of Belgium and Serbia from atrocities unspeakable? Is it not professional exponents of the Christian Gospel who are to-day inviting us to believe that the God of Jesus has deluged the world with blood and inflicted brutal tortures on millions of people of all nations and all faiths, merely as a gentle reminder that some of them have lately shown a reprehensible tendency to "forget" him? Was it not Christian clergymen (and they presumably know something of the character of their own Deity) who assured us that the God of Jesus has scattered ruin and devastation and misery and unutterable pain throughout half a world merely as a loving indication of his dissatisfaction with the Liberal Party in England for

attempting to "rob" him by disendowing the Church in Wales? After all, was Mr. Macleod so far astray as some "advanced" Christians would have us believe in his delineation of the character of the Christian Deity? A certain "gloomy dean" once told us (at a moment when the gloom was irradiated by a flash of genial irony) that "an honest God is the noblest work of man." The God created by Jews and Christians may be honest in a narrow sense—honest, at least, in revealing the darker side of his own personality; honesty, however, is not the only quality one wants in one's God, and for my own part I will confess that the graceful figure of the Greek Apollo with his lyre is to me infinitely more attractive, infinitely more worthy of love and admiration, than that of the beetle-browed Jehovah with his rod of iron and his tables of stone.

I venture to say that the name of "God" has been more "soiled by all ignoble use" than any other in the language. Mr. William Archer spoke well when, in his book about Mr. Wells's new god, he questioned whether it was possible "to deodorize a word which comes to us redolent of 'good, thick, stupefying incense-smoke,' mingled with the reek of the *auto-da-fé*." "Can we," he asks, "beat into a ploughshare the sword of St. Bartholomew and a thousand other deeds of horror? God has been by far the most tragic word in the whole vocabulary of the race—a spell to conjure up all the worst fiends in human nature." God must not be held responsible for this misuse of his name and this misinterpretation of his holy purposes? Perhaps not; but of what avail, then, are his inspired Bible, his infallible popes, his divinely-guided Church? For hundreds of thousands of years



man has been teaching himself, by slow and painful experience, that it behoves him to keep his body under strict control, so that it may not become the slave of its passions and appetites: how is it that Christ, though armed with divine wisdom and divine omnipotence, has been so singularly unsuccessful in checking the maleficent activities of that "mystical body" of his—the Church?

On the whole I doubt whether Christianity, for all the efforts of its countless theologians, has ever furnished us with a better definition of God than that given us by a benighted "heathen" Stoic of ancient Rome—*Deus est mortali jurare mortalem*—"God is the helping of man by man." Even if it is philosophically inadequate it is at least a good definition to live by; and perhaps when men have succeeded in bringing this God into being, and have securely enshrined him in the sanctuaries of their own hearts, they will at last find themselves brought into contact with a Divinity whom they can love and reverence without hypocrisy and without self-abasement. This God will not require them to prostrate themselves at his feet like sycophantic courtiers, nor will he compel them, under pain of hideous penalties, to "glorify His holy Name for ever and ever"; but he will teach them to love and understand him through loving and understanding one another, and he will help them to make this world a place of profounder happiness and more wondrous beauty than any "kingdom of heaven" that ever took shape in the dreams of prophet, saint, or priest.



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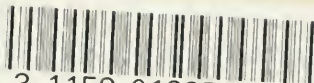
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